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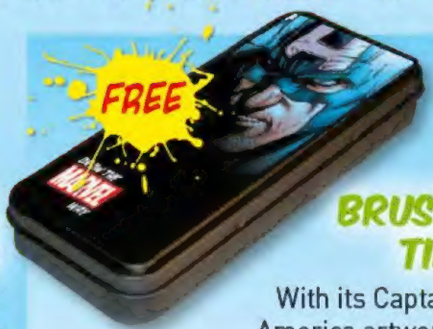

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EXCELSIOR!

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WELCOME!

Happy new year! And a big thank you to everyone who picked up our relaunch issue, we're thrilled with the response to it. This time around we're looking at the twin titans of DC: Superman and Batman. We have a huge 22 page section dedicated to these heavyweight hitters that kicks off on p36. If Marvel is more your style, then you'll be pleased to see we have a hefty interview with Deadpool co-creator Rob Liefeld starting on p72. But we're not just about the capes and cowls. I got to fulfil a personal ambition and talk to one of my all time favourite writers, Chuck Palahniuk, about his explosive *Fight Club 2*; we detail the history of Asterix; and there's the debut of a new regular feature, Lost Treasures, which this issue is looking at Nick Abadzis' masterful *Laika*. By the way, if you're in the vicinity of London, come along to **Orbital on 15 January**. We're having a party and we're bringing some of our comic creator friends. It'll be a great chance to meet awesome writers and artists, so do pop in and say hi. I hope to see some of you there.
Until the next time...

Will

Will Salmon, Editor

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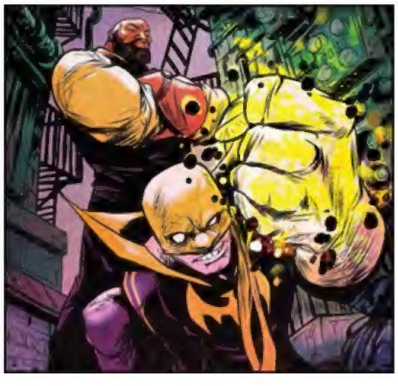

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HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FROM THE COMICS WORLD

THE ODD COUPLE

David Walker tells **Stephen Jewell** about reviving Marvel's Power Man and Iron Fist

Combining super-strong former convict Luke Cage with mystical martial arts expert Danny Rand, *Power Man and Iron Fist* has always been one of Marvel's more endearingly oddball team-ups. Now, three decades after their last joint venture ended in 1985 – and with both due to feature in (separate) new series from Netflix – the long-time friends are set to renew their union in a new monthly from *Shaft* and *Cyborg* author David F. Walker and artist Sanford Greene, in which Luke will also reclaim the name Power Man from its current user Victor Alvarez.

"One of the running gags is how Luke doesn't really go by 'Power Man' anymore, and yet that's how people know him," explains Walker. "It's partly about him grudgingly going back to Power Man, and also the fact that there's now more than one Power Man. People keep asking me that exact same question, to which I respond, 'There's also more than one Spider-Man and more than one Hawkeye!' So if that causes confusion, I'll just work it into the story."

Talking about the evolution of Jessica Jones, Brian Bendis recently told *SFX* that when he first created the former-superhero-turned-private-investigator in 2001's *Alias*, he wanted it to read as if she had been retconned into his favourite old comics such as Jo Duffy and Kerry Gammill's memorable run on *Power Man and Iron Fist* in the early '80s. Fast forward 15 years, and Luke and Jessica are now married and have a child, meaning that Jessica will inevitably feature in the new comic book adventures. "Initially, as the series finds its footing, she will just make brief cameos, but she's an important part of Luke's life, as is their daughter, so we will definitely see both of them," says Walker, who confirms that Luke and Danny's former partners-in-crime, Misty Knight and Colleen Wing, will also have a part to play.

> "FAST FORWARD 15 YEARS, AND LUKE AND JESSICA ARE MARRIED WITH A CHILD"

OLD FRIENDS, NEW CHALLENGES

"You can't have Power Man and Iron Fist and not have the Daughters of the Dragon!" he insists, revealing that Danny's mythical homeland K'un Lun will also eventually come into play in the series. "The key, of course, is how to use K'un Lun in a new way. As for Danny's powers, I want to play around with those in a way that challenges him as a character and forces him to grow."

Greene, who has previously pencilled the likes of *Wonder Girl* and *Runaways*, was already attached to the book before Walker came onboard. "I've wanted to work with Sanford for a very long time," says Walker. "Not only do I love his work, he has an enthusiasm on this project that matches my own. I get messages from him all the time with different ideas, which then fuels the fire of my imagination. Knowing his style and the dynamic range of action and emotion he is capable of bringing really helps me as a writer." CH

Power Man and Iron Fist #1 is published by Marvel on February 17.

Power Man? It certainly fits.

What Shaggy did after *Scooby Doo?*

ALL IMAGES © MARVEL.

> "THOR IS QUICK TO ANGER AND THIS WILL BE SHOWING UP IN THE NEXT ISSUE"

RAGNAROK AND ROLL

You can't keep a good god down. **Walt Simonson** tells **Joel Meadows** about returning for another round of Ragnarok

The first six issue run of *Ragnarok* finished last summer, but veteran comics creator Walt Simonson has no intention of letting the grass grow under his feet. December 2015's *Ragnarok* #7 was the first in another six issue run of the epic fantasy series.

"I have wrapped two major ongoing plot threads into the series," Simonson told *Comic Heroes*. "One of these is that the interest of Surtur has been aroused, as he has figured out that Thor is likely alive and so he is sending a number of fire demons to Asgard. The second story involves Black Elf Assassin Regn and his daughter Drifta, who are hiding in Asgard, watching Thor tie up the pyre which holds his wife's body. So both those plot threads will be addressed in the first two issues of the series and the story of Regn and his daughter will probably be addressed in the next six."

Even though he is dealing with mythic characters, Simonson believes that is important for him to give them human traits that the reader can recognise and empathise with.

"You want to give your characters personality. Even the Norse gods have personalities. Thor is quick to anger and this will be definitely showing up in the next issue."

Simonson does have an end for the series in mind, but he hopes to explore the themes in *Ragnarok* for a little while to come.

"The first arc was six issues and the second arc is too. I expect to stay with six issues per arc generally speaking, but there may be some shorter ones in the long run. I do have an end for the series in mind for the series, which is a long way off. I'm hoping not to get there for a while. I have a lot of the middle story I haven't figured out yet, but I do know where I want to go in the series by the time I get to the end of it." CH

The hardcover collection of Ragnarok is out now.

Above and right: Some of Walt Simonson's beautiful pencils for *Ragnarok*, which he also scripted. He's known as a legend for a reason, y'know...

MORE WAR!

You like Iron Man, you like Cap, but which one's better? There's only one way to find out...

Epic superhero smackdown *Civil War* was a huge hit for Marvel back in 2006. So much so that they're making a film of it. You may have heard about that...

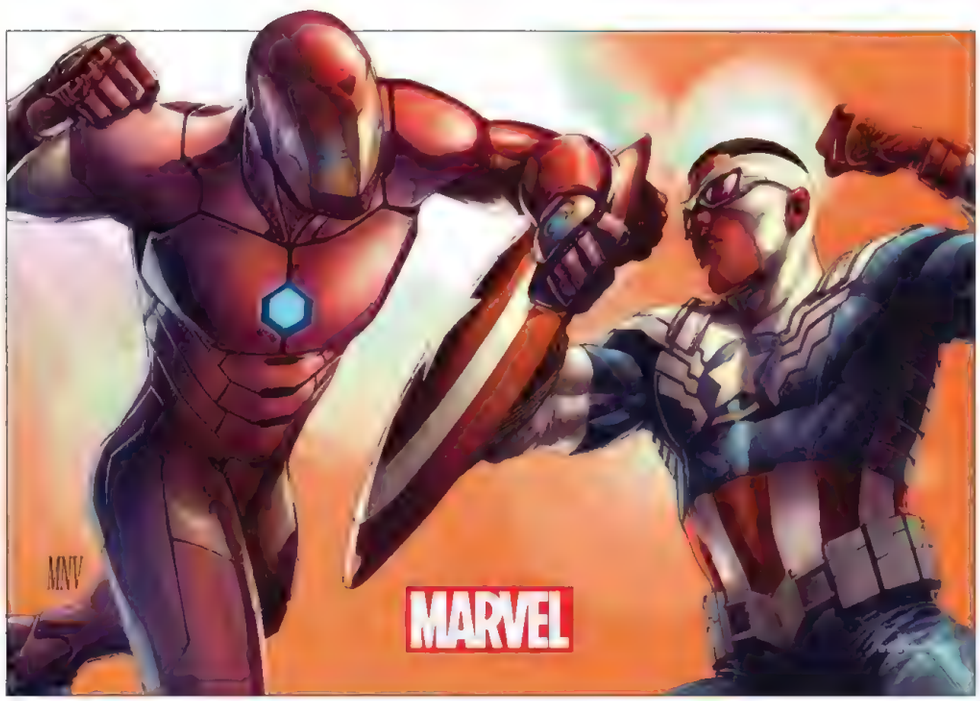
Absolutely definitely entirely coincidentally, at about the same time as Tony and Cap are beating each other up on the big screen, Marvel will be publishing a sequel to the original story. *Civil War 2* has been teased to comic stores with a postcard depicting Tony getting ready to deliver a knuckle sandwich to Captain America (now Sam Wilson, rather than Steve Rogers) and the company has since confirmed that yes, *Civil War 2* is going to be a thing.

"Civil War was a seismic event that demanded the attention of existing fans and created new ones because it tapped into the most pressing question of its day," said Marvel Editor-in-Chief Axel Alonso, promising that the sequel will do the same. Though, we assume, on a bigger scale.

So what do we know? So far only that it will be written and drawn by the current *Invincible Iron Man* creative team of Brian Michael Bendis and David Marquez. "The original *Civil War* is one of the most important Marvel comics ever," said Bendis. "We are all very excited to have come up with what we hope is a story worthy of the title."

The original story, by Mark Millar and Steve McNiven saw the numerous heroes of the Marvel universe fall out in quite spectacular fashion over the Superhero Registration Act – though there's no word as yet what will cause of this latest ruckus.

Civil War is perhaps most famous for delivering a big old sting in the tale and, with the buzz building and the *Captain America: Civil War* trailer doing huge numbers, you can see the obvious appeal in tying into that. No doubt this sequel will dominate this year's crop of Marvel super-books.



Below: So far your only glimpse of *Civil War 2* We're rooting for Sam here, personally

IN THE FRAME

ANNOUNCEMENTS, INFO AND OTHER INTERESTING STUFF...

2000AD ON FOR FCBD

LOOK NORTH

ATWOOD ARRIVES

KANAN KANNED

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A DIFFERENT LEAGUE

Stephen Jewell talks to Judge Dredd co-creator **John Wagner** about why he's bringing aliens to the beautiful game...

Left and above: Artist Dan Cornwell says he leapt at the chance to do this series. "My three loves combined: comics, sci-fi and football. A beautiful combo!"

Right: Wagner is full of praise for the passion and attention to detail in Cornwell's art

The last time *Roy Of The Rovers'* weekly adventures hit the newsstand, in 1993, the Premier League was in its infancy. Now, three decades later, the beautiful game is making a comic book comeback.

Rok Of The Reds is a new six-part mini-series by Judge Dredd co-creator John Wagner, Alan Grant and Dan Cornwell, which will be published by Glasgow's Black Hearted Press in March. "It's not like anything else that Alan and I have done," Wagner tells *Comic Heroes*. "There's a strong retro feel to it, a homage to the comics of our youth – but with the added twist of a rampaging alien!"

Originally intended for a self-published anthology that never got off the ground, Rok – or Rom as the extraterrestrial in question was initially called before being rechristened to avoid confusion with Hasbro's similarly-named Spaceknight – was subsequently consigned to the back-burner. "We did

"LET'S SAY KYLE IS TALENTED BUT TROUBLED, AND ROK HAS A SWIFT WAY OF DEALING WITH THE TALENTED BUT TROUBLED"

consider placing it somewhere else, but at the time any other natural home for it had folded, and so there was really only *2000 AD*," recalls Wagner. "But although there's a strong sci-fi element to the story, we didn't think it quite fitted there."

Insisting that "it's not something I can go into much, and you'll understand why when you read the opening part," Wagner explains that the series centres around Rok of Arkadi, a fugitive alien with some extraordinary powers, who crosses paths with bad boy footballer Kyle Dixon soon after crashing to Earth. "Let's say Kyle is talented but troubled, and Rok has a swift way of dealing with the talented but troubled," teases Wagner, who is keen to give Grant the credit he deserves even though Wagner is now flying solo on the scripts.

IT'S A TEAM GAME

"I revised and expanded the first part from our original version and have been writing the rest of the story alone," he says. "But Alan and I talked it through in such detail that I've been able to put it together pretty much as we'd planned, based on memory and the notes we made at the time. So though it's just me at the keyboard, it genuinely feels like a joint effort."

In need of a talented artist, Wagner approached newcomer Dan Cornwell after spotting his work in the *2000 AD*-inspired fanzine *Dogbreath*. "He wasn't drawing football there but his grasp of character and obvious sense of humour appealed immediately," he says. "It's been great watching him grow into the story. He takes a lot of care with his layouts and drawing, and some of the detail he puts in is simple amazing. He's going to go far!"

As for Rok himself, Wagner is hoping that his performance on the football pitch – and on the comic shop shelves – should be impressive enough to warrant a possible sequel. "I've only got the final part still to write and have enjoyed the process so much that I'm already thinking about how I can take Rok into a second series," he reveals. "Should he survive, of course!"

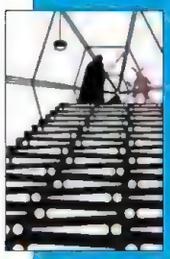
Above left: In *Roy Of The Rovers* or a Future Shock, you'd know the bad boy player is due for his comeuppance

Above right: What's the secret of the fugitive alien Rok?

IN THE FRAME

ANNOUNCEMENTS, INFO AND OTHER INTERESTING STUFF...

VADER V JAXXON



SUPERGIRL SOARS

ROM'S RETURN

SCARY STUFF

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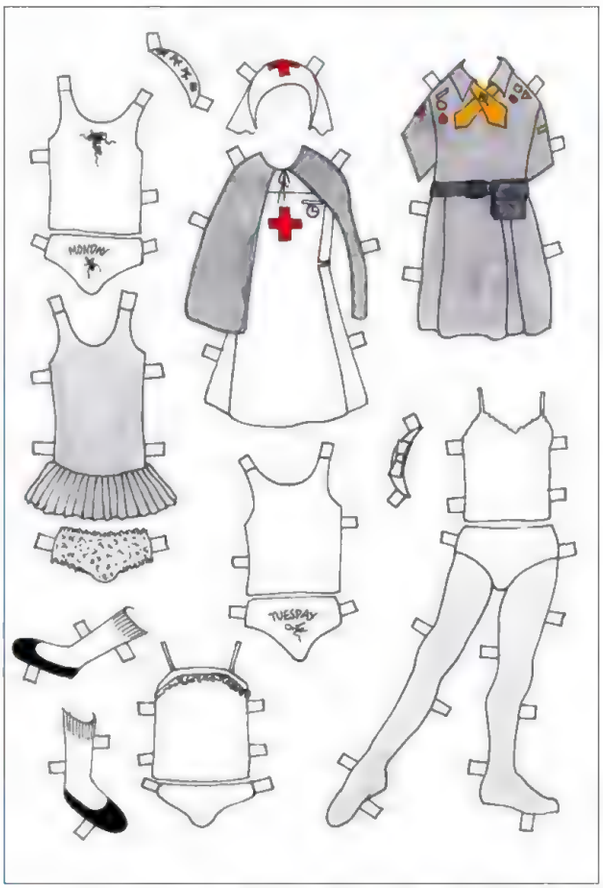
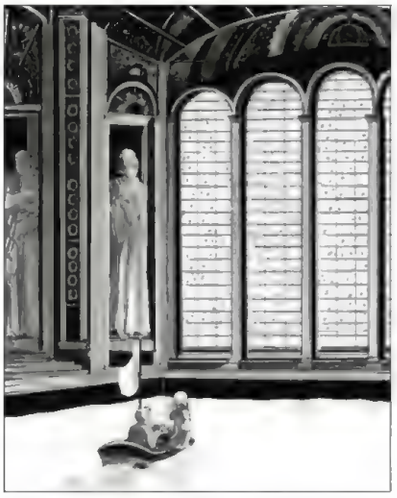
COMIX CREATRIX

Olivia Ahmad is the co-curator of an expansive new exhibition of comics art by women. Paul Gravett finds out more...





Comix Creatrix: 100 Women Making Comics is the biggest exhibition so far in the UK of comics created by women. Running at the House of Illustration, near King's Cross in London, it features a hugely varied selection of work from 100 different and talented artists.

Why do female artists need their own exhibition?

Female artists working in the past have certainly been unfairly forgotten and deserve to be recognised. This is changing thanks to historians like underground pioneer Trina Robbins and exhibitions like Sarah Lightman's Graphic Details. The Marie Duval archive (www.marieduval.org) has rightly re-stated Duval as a 19th century groundbreaker. I don't think women working today need to be given an exhibition, exactly (they are doing their thing with gusto!), but their work commands one.

What range of work are you showing in the exhibition?

Quite a broad one. The earliest piece is from the 18th century, the most recent was made this year. It was important to demonstrate that women don't make a particular type of comic. They work with all kinds of subject matter and take a massive range of aesthetic approaches. So we will show work by Fay Dalton for *2000 AD*, Kate Evans' recent biography of Rosa Luxemburg and Audrey Niffenegger's *The Night Bookmobile*. We've focused mainly on British creators, but we have included examples of outstanding influential international work. As 'Comix' in the title suggests, we've concentrated mostly on comics aimed at adults. Still we are presenting some artists' work from girls' comics, such as Shirley Bellwood's *Misty*.

What are some of the highlights in the exhibition for you?

All of them are special, of course, but here are a few. In the mid 1700s, Mary Darly ran a print shop in London and created caricatures of politicians and satirised fashionable ladies. It is thought that she drew the first 'how to' book on caricature. Kripa Joshi is a creator from Nepal based in the UK. I love her heroine Miss Moti, whose realistic stature is a riposte to hyper-sexualised superheroines. British creator Una's book *Becoming Unbecoming* recounts the violence she experienced at the same time as the hunt for serial killer Peter Sutcliffe. She contrasts media sensationalism and personal experiences to create a damning description of how many women are made to feel blamed for the abusive actions of others. Nadine Redlich, based in Germany, makes *Ambient Comics* which portray quiet minute moments, like a crack appearing in a wall. They are almost meditative, but then make you laugh!

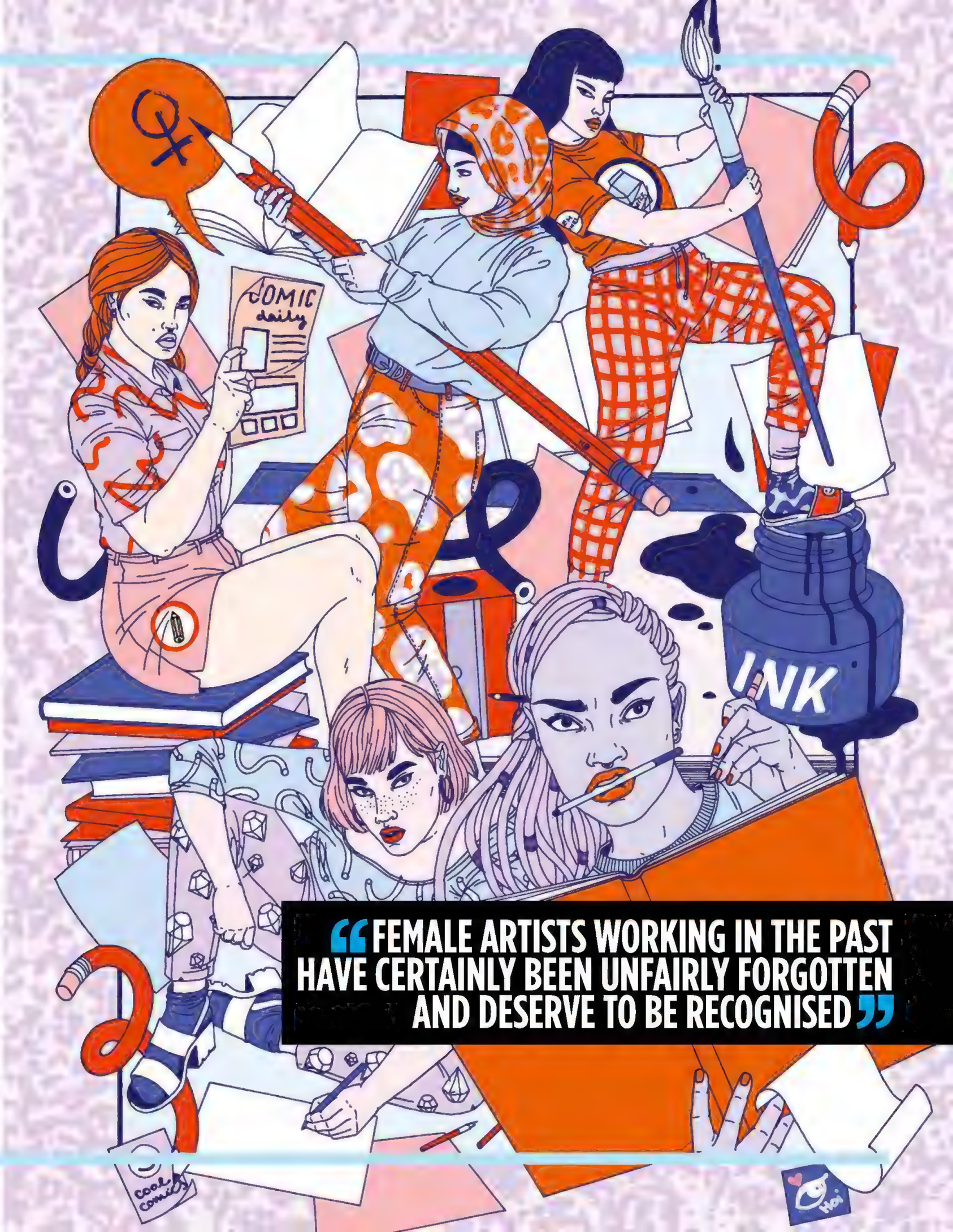
What effects do you hope Comix Creatrix will have?

I hope comics enthusiasts will enjoy seeing original works by artists they know well and discover other work that they haven't seen before. I really hope that people who might know little about comics beyond Hollywood blockbusters will discover what a powerful, versatile form this is and become hooked. And I hope some future creators might visit and get inspired by the diversity of work that is welcomed in the world of comics – particularly women! CH

Above: A selection of some the many different styles that will be shown at the exhibition

Right: Laura Callaghan's stunning promo image.

Comix Creatrix is at House of Illustration from February 5th to May 15th 2016. For details of events: www.houseofillustration.org.uk



"FEMALE ARTISTS WORKING IN THE PAST HAVE CERTAINLY BEEN UNFAIRLY FORGOTTEN AND DESERVE TO BE RECOGNISED"

ON THE RACKS

We look ahead to some of the other exciting new comics headed our way over the next three months...

JANUARY

FOUR EYES: HEARTS OF FIRE (IMAGE)

DEVOLUTION (DYNAMITE)

CRY HAVOC (IMAGE)

THE LEGEND OF WONDER WOMAN (DC)

FEBRUARY

SUPERMANL THE COMING OF THE SUPERMEN (DC)
Neal Adams writing and drawing the Man of Steel? Sold. This six-issue mini-series finds Darkseid up to no good once more. Luckilly Supes has some support from three residents of miniature city Kandor.
3 February

BILL AND TED GO TO HELL (BOOM!)

They've been there before, but this time Bill and Ted are heading back to Hell to rescue their old pal Death. Brian Joines writes and the enigmatically named Bachan draws the laconic rockers.
TBC February

SPIDER-MAN (MARVEL)
Secret Wars has been and gone and now Miles Morales is truly Spider-Man in the main Marvel universe. With Brian Michael Bendis writing and Sara Pichaelli on the art duties, this is sure to be a big new series for All-New, All-Different Marvel.
TBC February

FIGHT CLUB 2 (DARK HORSE)
The storming sequel comes to an end this month – though we're promised a third round of action next year. Has Tyler's grand scheme finally come to fruition?
24 February

MARCH

MOCKINGBIRD (MARVEL)

BATMAN (DC)

ARCHER AND ARMSTRONG (VALIANT)

PREDATOR: LIFE AND DEATH (DARK HORSE)

CRIME SCENE

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FEATURING WALLANDER, THE BRIDGE, BORGEN, TRAPPED AND MORE...

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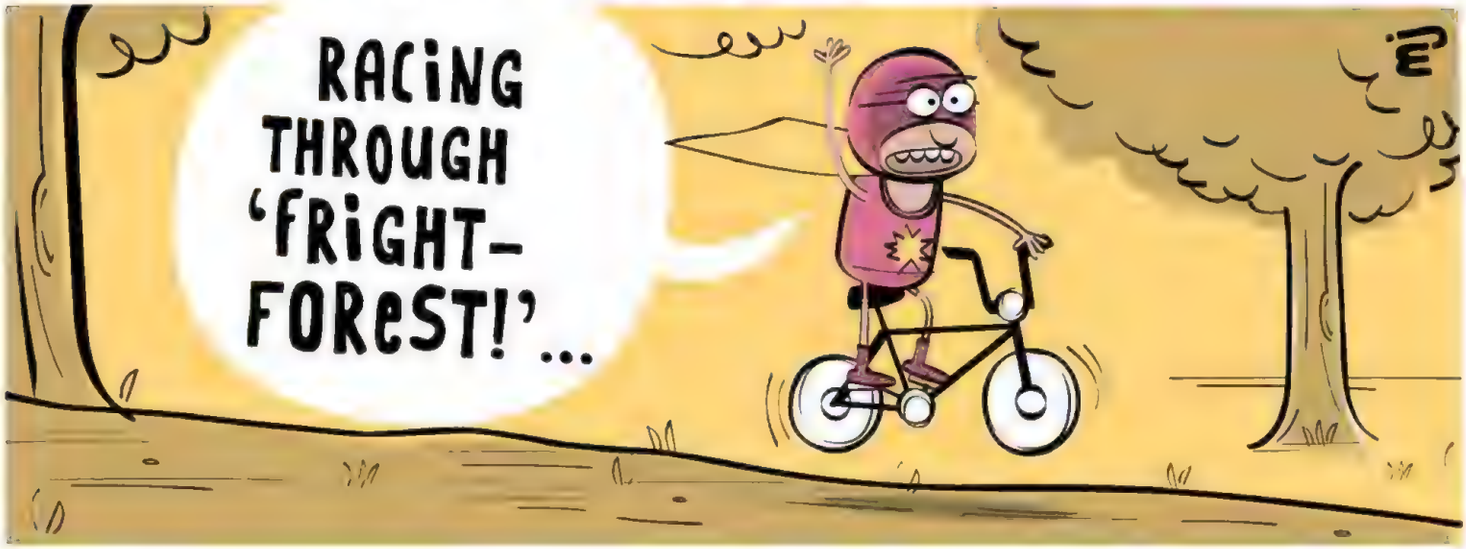
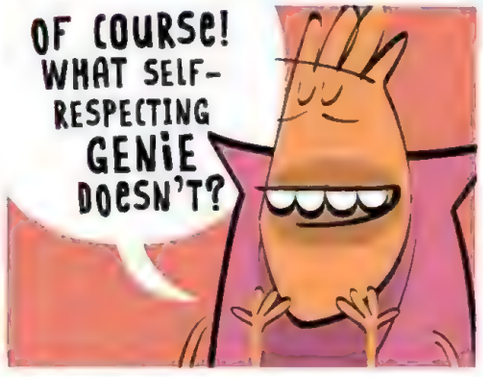
KA-PUNCH!

A COMIC BY MARC JACKSON





CUT TO THE CHASE TYPE eH?
LAY iT ON Me KiD!
MAKE ME A SUPER-HERO WITH...
'COSMiC-PUNCH POWeRS!!'
'YOU GOT iT!'
BLA-ZOOP!!
WOOOO!!
NOW FiLL 'BiG CITY' WiTH BAD-GUYS, CRAZY MUTANTS, AND TOTAL WeiRDOS FOR Me BATTLE!!
PREMO CHOiCE LiTTLE DUDE! YOU'RE ON A ROLL!
FRA-ZANG!!
'DONE!'
OK NOW, LAST WiSH, MAKE iT REALLY, REALLY COUNT...
SCRATCH
UMMM MMMM MMMNN
UMMMMNN
THiNKS
COMe ON KiD, YOU CAN DO iT! DON'T LeAVE A GENiE HANGiN' WHADDAYA WANT?!!
FiSH-TACOS!!

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TO BE CONTINUED!

ABOUT LEAH

Leah Moore is a writer of comics, prose and journalism, as well as the co-founder of the revolutionary *Electricomics*. She has written for *Albion*, *Wild Girls*, *Tom Strong* and more. Follow her on Twitter at **@leahmoore**.

It's been... emotional

When I read a comic I am looking for something. I am looking for a surprise, a twist, a hook that grabs me and makes me suddenly care. I am looking for *The Feels*.

If I don't find any feels, I bounce off the book, I kind of forget it, I don't register it especially, and that bit of my brain gets filled with to-do lists and queries about where somebody's PE kit is.

If I do find the feels, then the book is emblazoned across my heart in burning purple flames that are fanned by my fandom. I mention them so often it's like I have a secret crush. I find my mind replaying parts of them randomly through the day. I find myself smitten with jealousy that I didn't write it myself, and angry when somebody throws shade on it.

"Books are emblazoned across my heart in burning purple flames like a secret crush"

When I find a new comic that I really love, and which is perhaps not very widely known, I am horribly torn between shouting it from the rooftops and keeping it all to myself, so that nobody else can ruin its shine.

I collect comic creators as well as comics. Finding somebody on Twitter who not only makes awesome comics but posts about them often is like hitting a rich golden seam of awesome. I am especially pleased if said comic creators are also women, because then pride is added to the mix: Go, sister! Every time a girl makes a comic, a Gamergate Dudebro trips over his underpants and tips Mountain Dew into his Xbox.

I am omnivorous and even fickle when it comes to sequential art, consuming not only print books, but any and all formats that take my fancy. I back people on Patreon, download Humble Bundles, browse *Sequential*, binge-read webcomics and drool on the plastic covers of huge special slip-cased editions. One day I will get all those

DON'T YOU DARE PUT THIS ON ME! DAMN YOU, SPEEDY! AREN'T YOU GUYS ALL SICK AND TIRED OF WATCHING ME MAKE AN ALL-STAR ASS OF MYSELF? AREN'T YOU? I AM!
I DON'T WANT TO WANT YOU ANY MORE, SPEEDY. I DON'T WANT TO WANT RAND RACE ANY MORE. I CAN'T... I CAN'T DO IT ANY MORE. IT HURTS TOO MUCH...
EMERGENCY
ISN'T THAT THAT ORTIZ KID'S CAR?
YEAH, WHAT'S HE UP TO SO LATE, OR SHOULD I SAY SO EARLY?

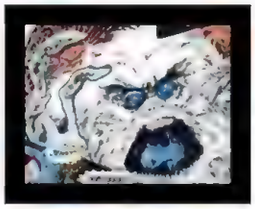
glorious books and I will unbox them and sniff the new paper smell. I am guilty of comics envy, or comics greed, or maybe just comics love.

I would put Maggie and Speedy's sublimely-doomed almost-romance right up there with Paris and Helen of Troy, or Orpheus and Eurydice. The Monkey King from *Swamp Thing* is shelved in my head next to *Whistle and I'll Come to You* in terms of terror. *Muscle Memory* by Al Davison pushes so many buttons at once, it needs its own shelf just for badass baby memoirs.

The feel of disappointment

I do sometimes read comics I really don't like, and my overall feeling is usually outrage at the waste of it all. The time spent on it, the money, the energy that such a comic has consumed from all who came into contact with it. I consign them to the large mental bin marked "Meh" and move on.

Some people might read comics more analytically than me, and compare the plots or the world-building or the mastery of the layout, and that is all mighty fine and valid, but for me, it is all about the *feels.*



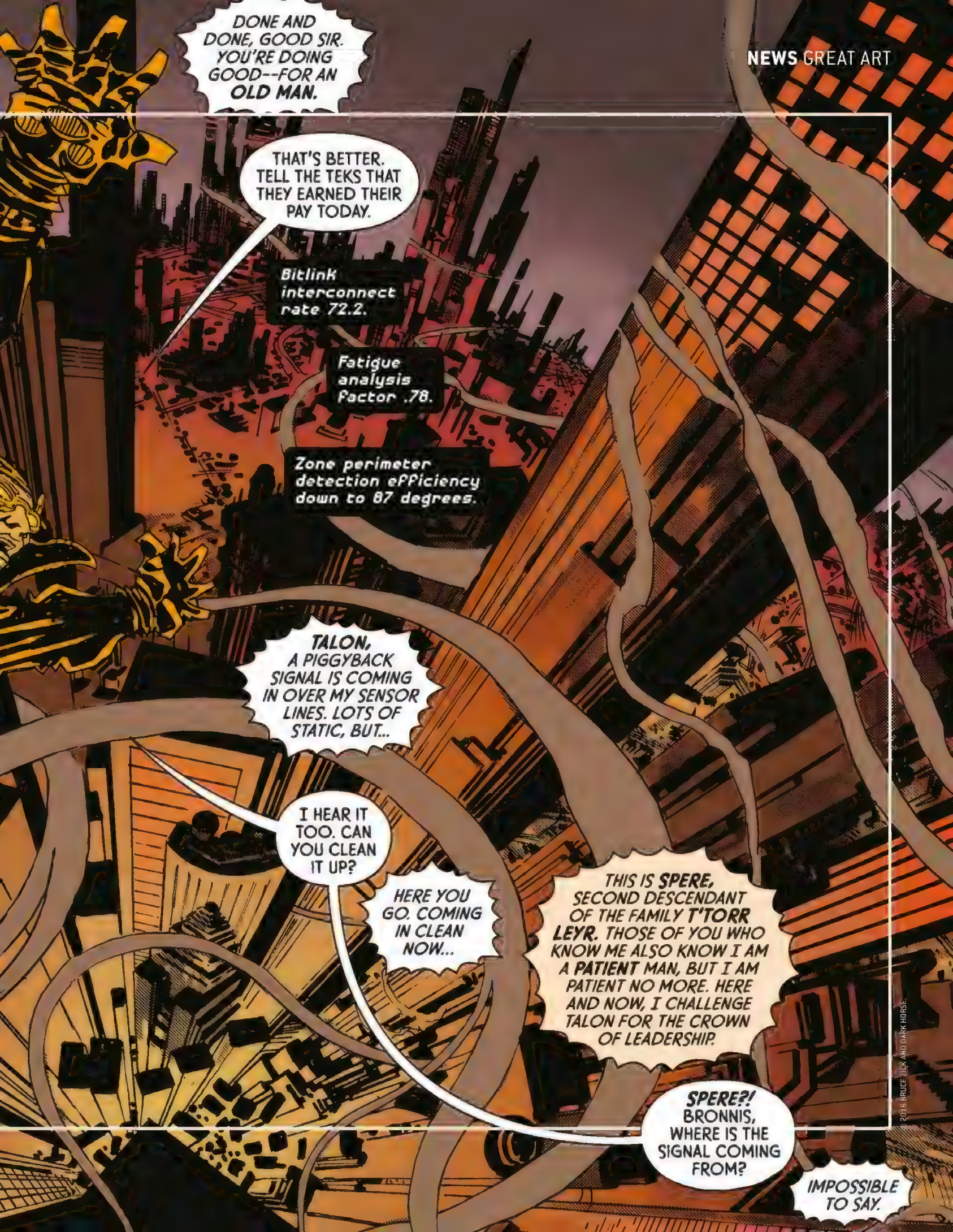
Above left: Jaime Hernandez's Maggie and Speedy were among the favourite characters in the groundbreaking *Love and Rockets*

Above right: Al Davison's *Muscle Memory* is the in-progress sequel to his acclaimed graphic novel memoir *The Spiral Cage*

Above: The Monkey King is a demon who appeared in several issues of *Swamp Thing* written by Alan Moore.

The Zone Continuum

Bruce Zick's fabulous science fiction masterpiece *The Zone Continuum* was first published over 20 years ago. 2006 saw the series return as an ongoing digital comic, and now Zick is back on the saga again with this book of all-new stories published by Dark Horse. *The Zone Continuum, Volume 1* also includes a glossary and a sketchbook. It's available 24 February.


DONE AND DONE, GOOD SIR. YOU'RE DOING GOOD--FOR AN OLD MAN.
THAT'S BETTER. TELL THE TEKS THAT THEY EARNED THEIR PAY TODAY.
Bitlink interconnect rate 72.2.
Fatigue analysis factor .78.
Zone perimeter detection efficiency down to 87 degrees.
TALON, A PIGGYBACK SIGNAL IS COMING IN OVER MY SENSOR LINES. LOTS OF STATIC, BUT...
I HEAR IT TOO. CAN YOU CLEAN IT UP?
HERE YOU GO. COMING IN CLEAN NOW...
THIS IS SPERE, SECOND DESCENDANT OF THE FAMILY T'TORR LEYR. THOSE OF YOU WHO KNOW ME ALSO KNOW I AM A PATIENT MAN, BUT I AM PATIENT NO MORE. HERE AND NOW, I CHALLENGE TALON FOR THE CROWN OF LEADERSHIP.
SPERE?! BRONNIS, WHERE IS THE SIGNAL COMING FROM?
IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY.

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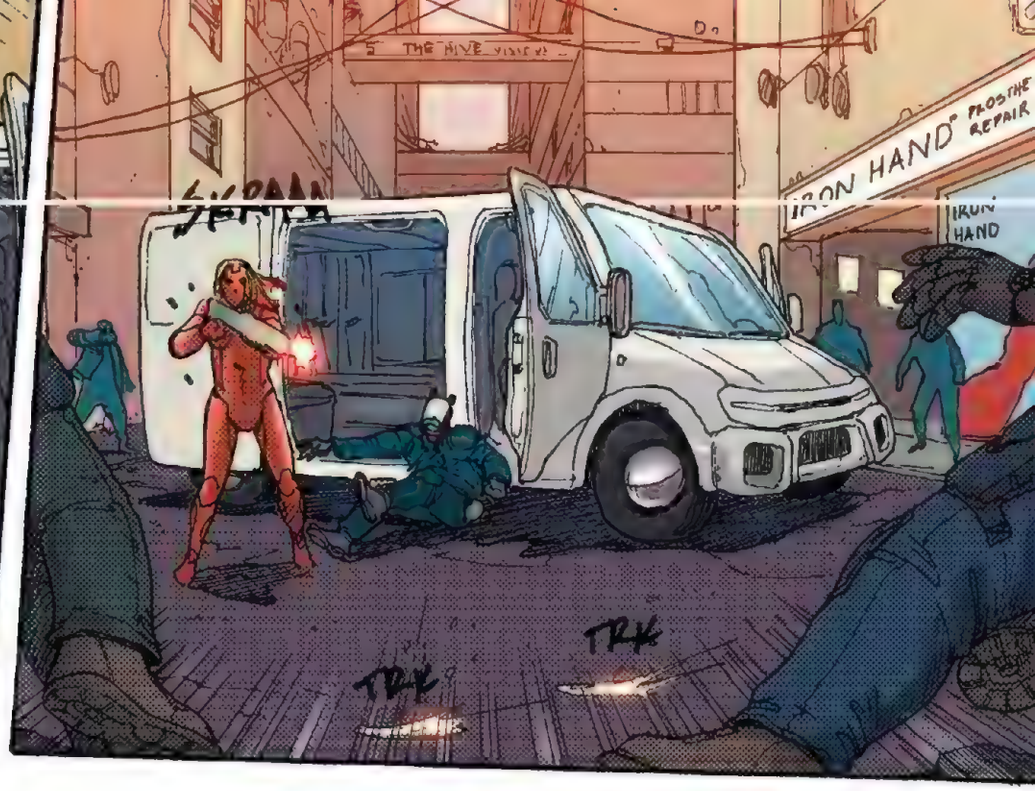
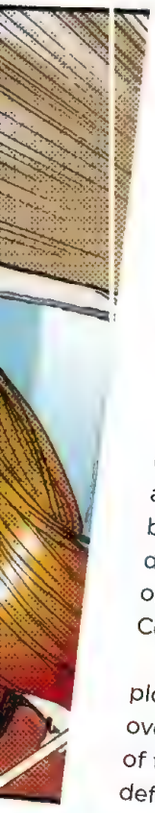
Splash Pages



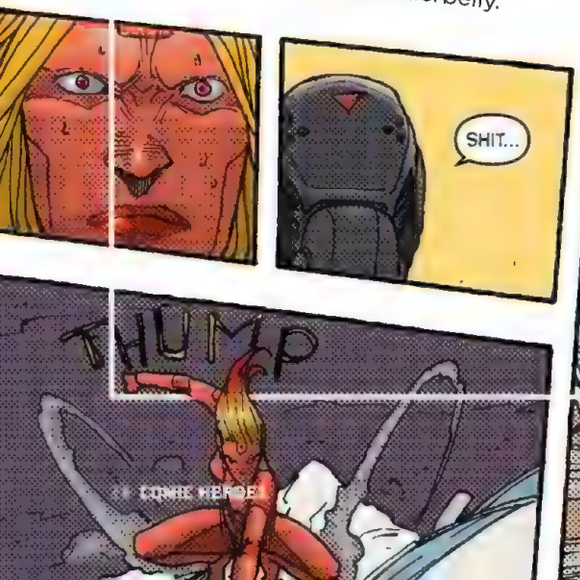


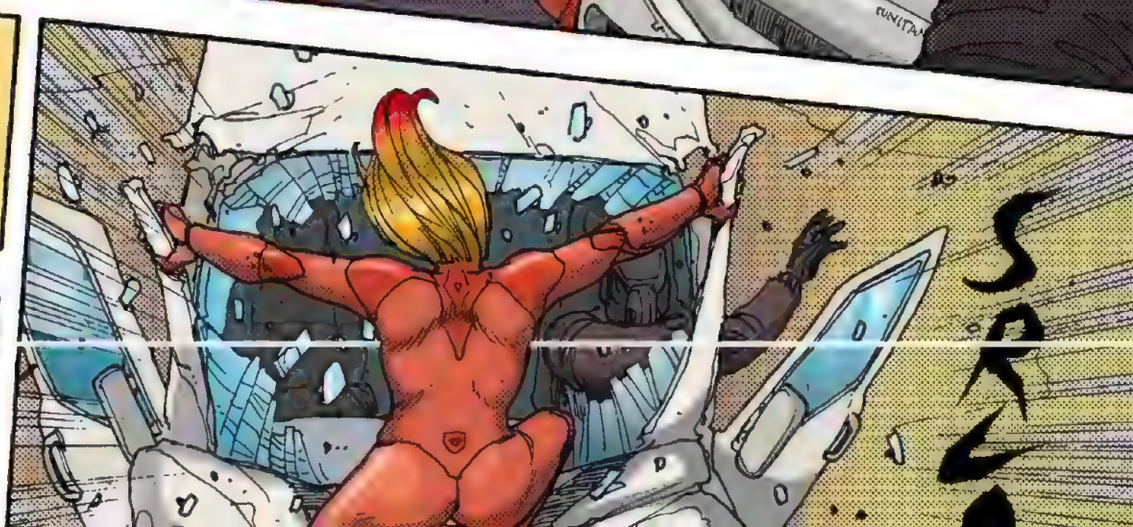
Man Plus

With polished, manga-influenced artwork reminiscent of *Akira* and themes evocative of *Ghost in the Shell*, Titan Comics' four-issue miniseries *Man Plus* brings the action-packed web comics thriller to print.

In 2042, the world is dominated by multinational corporations, and Olissipo City in Portugal has sprung up around the HQ of a powerful biotech company. As the firm's cybernetically-enhanced enforcers ruthlessly pursue an apparently renegade cyborg, a maverick elite squad of the city's police force is caught up in a web of action and conspiracy that blurs the lines between human and machine. *Man Plus* is written and drawn by André Lima Araújo, best known for his art on *Avengers AI*, *Ultimate FF* and *Age of Apocalypse*. Colours are by Arsia Rozegar.

The characters are engaging and the twist-filled plot is gripping, but you'll also find yourself poring over the crisp, detailed artwork, taking in the nuances of this dystopian world's convincing future tech and its deftly-depicted seedy underbelly.





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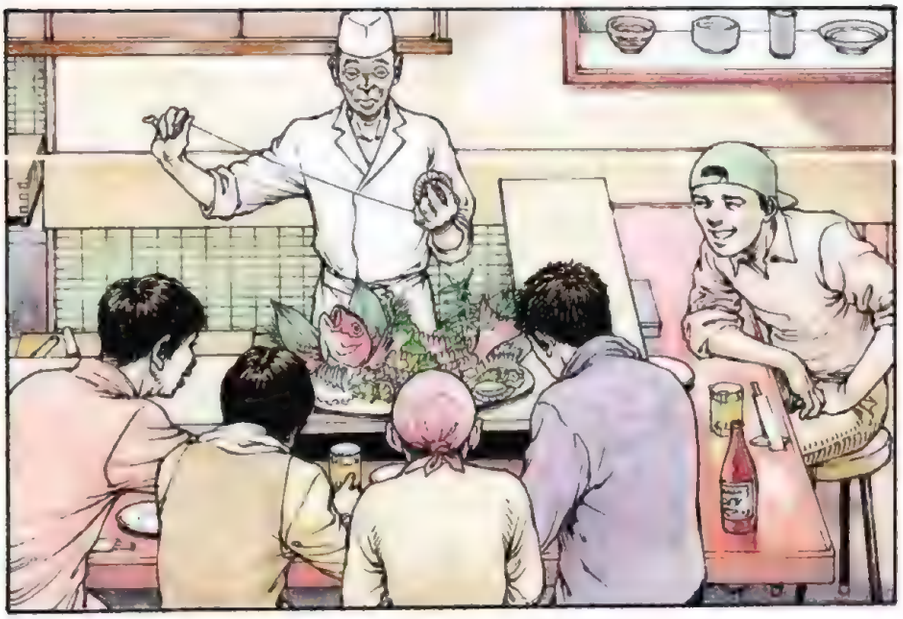
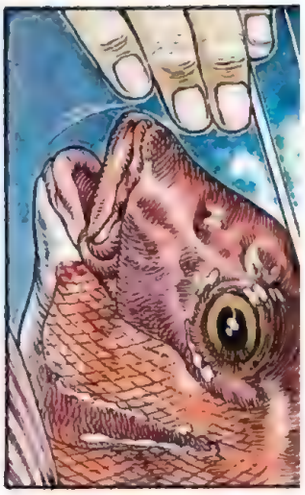
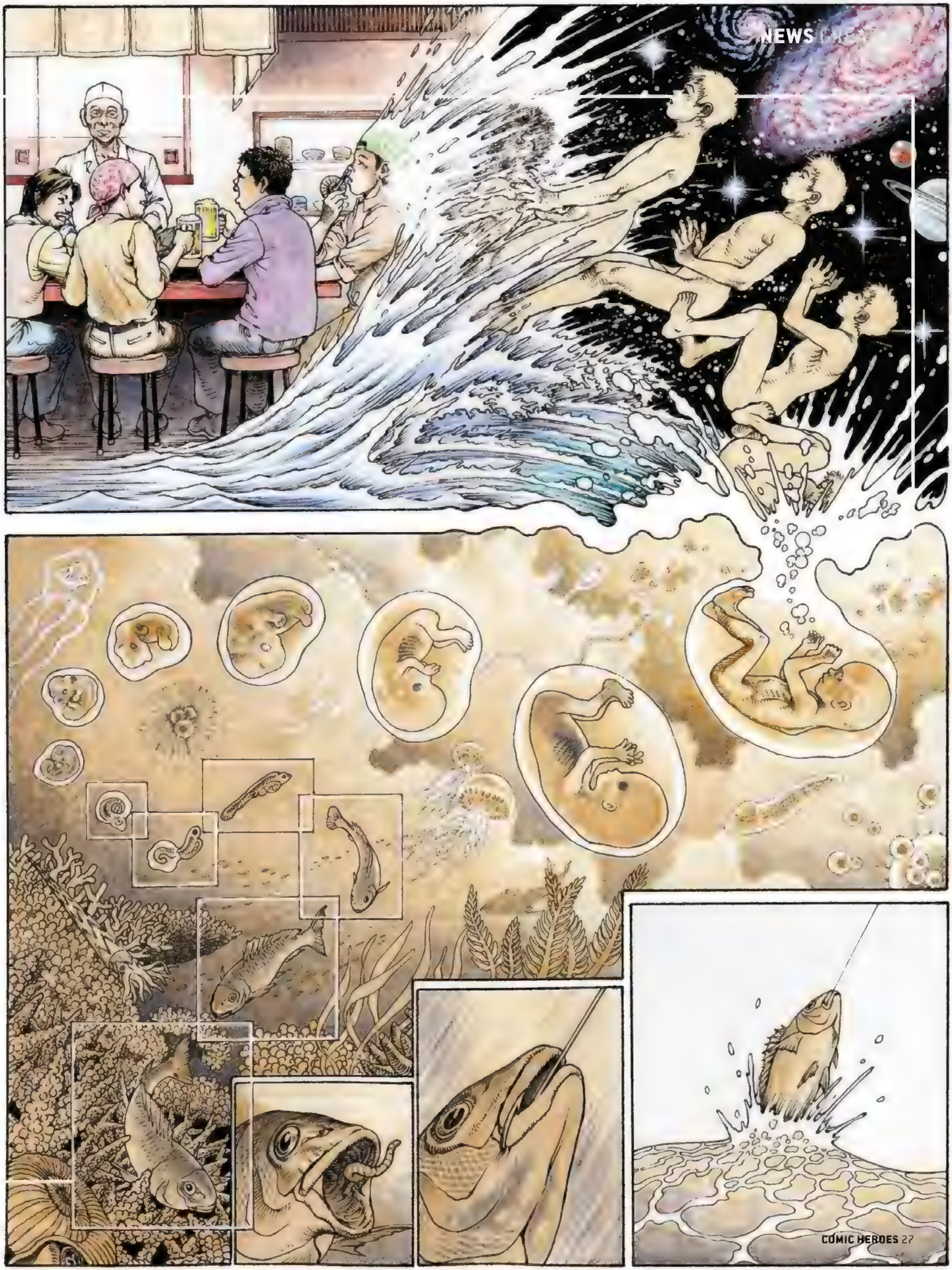
IT'S CLIMBING!
IRON HA
FIRE!
SPLSH





The Tipping Point

The latest anthology from Humanoids brings together creators from across the globe for 13 eye-popping stories, each exploring themes of mutation and revolution. Pictured is Keiichi Koike's stunning contribution. Others in the impressive line-up include Boulet, Eddie Campbell, Emmanuel Lepage, Naoki Urasawa and more. *The Tipping Point* is bound in a beautiful cover by Enki Bilal and is out now.



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SHAPERS OF WORLDS

RAPID-FIRE Q&As WITH COMIC CREATORS

EMMA VIECELI

The artist on Titan's sterling *Doctor Who: The Eighth Doctor* series talks to **Will Salmon** about Paul McGann, designing a brand new companion, and her very specific history with Who...

BORN ESSEX
HIGH VAMPIRE ACADEMY
NOW ALEX RIDER, BREAKS, DOCTOR WHO
MORE EMMAVIECELI.COM

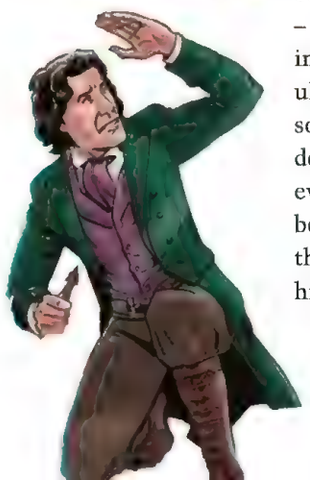
Comic Heroes: First off, how did you come to work on the *Eighth Doctor* book?

Emma Vieceli: I think I have Steve White of Titan to thank. A good while back he asked me if I were able to draw any Doctor, which would I choose? I said the Eighth, assuming we were talking hypotheticals, but he looked thoughtful about it. It was over a year later that I was offered the job, but I can't help but think that the conversation with Steve may have helped. I couldn't have dreamed of a job more exciting than a complete standalone mini-series, and a new companion! Just brilliant! I couldn't possibly say no!

CH: Are you a *Who* fan in general?

EV: My knowledge and interest in *Who* is very specifically targeted and largely limited to classic *Who*. I've not seen a whole lot of the new episodes, something I should address as soon as schedule allows me to watch some television! That said, I genuinely have a soft spot for the Fifth and Eighth Doctors. As an artist, I'm more able to listen to audio drama than I am able to watch TV, so most of my *Who* comes via the Big Finish stories. What I love most about *Doctor Who* is the concept of the Doctor as an entity – what the Doctor stands for and how (especially by Eight's incarnation) his ideals are tested by the worlds he's trying to protect. So, while I'd feel a bit of a fraud calling myself a fan of the television series, I'd say I could safely call myself a fan of "the Doctor".

> I genuinely have a soft spot for the Fifth and Eighth Doctors.



Below: One of the covers for #2. This one is by Rachel Stott and Luis Guerrero. The figure below is from the variant cover by Warren Pleice.

CH: Where do you think the Eighth Doctor stands in the pantheon of Doctors?

EV: He stands on a precipice in the Doctor's history. He is all too aware of the wars raging, the anger in the universe; he's felt acute loss... but he believes in the good in people. He's a romantic, he wants adventure and fun and maybe just a little distraction from the horrors he's experienced. I'm a huge fan of conflicted characters, and – for me – McGann's Doctor is the most interesting, challenged and ultimately tragic of the pantheon so far. We already know his final decision, his choice to let go of everything he's tried to be and become everything he hates, for the greater good. That makes his journey there loaded with

I'M SO SORRY, JOSIE. I SHOULD NEVER HAVE BROUGHT YOU HERE. I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE FUN!
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT, DOCTOR.
YOU COULD HARDLY KNOW THAT A NAME AND A SET OF CODES FOUND IN AN OLD BOOK COULD LEAD TO THIS!
SO I'M JUST GOT TO GET BACK TO THE TARDIS. MAYBE I CAN FIND A WAY TO SLOW YOUR METABOLISM WHILE I WORK OUT HOW TO REVIVE YOU.
THAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE IT'LL BE REASSURING ENOUGH.
DESCRIBE IT ANYWAY SO YOU'LL BE SURE NOT TO GET THE SMART OUT.
DON'T WE?
YES, OF COURSE WE DO. RIGHT?
OH, WOW. I'M GOING TO TURN INTO ONE OF THOSE STATUES AREN'T I, LIKE THE PEOPLE OUT THERE.
NO, NO, NO, NO. I KNOW. I KNOW WHAT TO WATCH, JOSIE.
YOU CAN STOP IT THEN?
STOP! STAY EXACTLY WHERE YOU ARE!

anticipation and real emotion for me.

CH: Is visual reference material a problem for this particular Doctor, given that he had such a short life on television?

EV: Not hugely. For me as an artist, it's almost ideal, in fact. I'm in awe of artists who are able to capture real likeness in their drawings, but I'm just not one of them. One of my big concerns has been trying to capture likeness to the detriment of expressiveness of character. We're featuring the Eighth Doctor at a time no one's really seen him, visually. He's not quite at "The Night Of The Doctor", but he's far past the young man who was excited at finding shoes that fit perfectly. Having less to go on TV-wise frees me up as a comicker. I feel like I'm drawing the Eighth Doctor more than Paul McGann.

This page and opposite: First time out and new companion Josie Day is already in danger in the second issue of the Eighth Doctor's latest tale

CH: Tell us a little bit about Josie Day...

EV: George [Mann, the series' writer] wrote her into existence, but visually she's my baby. I'm so incredibly proud of having had the chance to introduce a new companion into the world. George was wonderfully receptive to my ideas for Josie and she really took shape quickly. I'm really excited about her and hope readers warm to her as we have. If I see cosplay of her, I may pass out with joy.

CH: Do you find George's scripts a challenge to draw?

EV: George is wonderful to work with. His scripts are thoughtful, well-paced and take dialogue order and character placement into consideration. Plus, he's very open to me adding and messing about with panel counts when it comes to storytelling on the page.

Together with our amazing editor, Andrew James, I think we make a good team; it's definitely a team I love being a part of. My only wish would be more time. Always more time. I'd love to have been able to spend a week or so on design for each issue, as we're often introducing entirely new worlds and races.

CH: How do you collaborate?

We talk a lot, along with Andrew. The three of us share a lot of back and forth and the whole process feels very friendly and team-like, despite the fact that George and I have only met in person once so far – madness!

CH: Any plans for a second series of *Eighth Doctor* adventures?

EV: Oh, we hope so...

CH: What else do you have coming up in 2016?

EV: I'm moving on to something very different but exciting after finishing up on *Doctor Who*. I don't think I can say what it is just yet, but it's back in the world of superheroes. I'll be hoping to get the first volume of *BREAKS* out into the world in printed form, which co-writer Malin Rydén and I are very excited about (the web version can be found at breakscomic.com). And pending schedules from Walker, I'll be diving back into the world of Alex Rider. I do like mixing up what I'm working on. CH

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JOE BENITEZ

A protégé of the legendary Marc Silvestri, **Joe Benitez** is currently getting fans excited as the creator and penciller of the hit series *Lady Mechanika*. **Russell Sheath** spoke to him about his career, his time at Top Cow and Image, and his plans for his steampunk heroine

BORN GUADALAJARA
HIGH JLA, THE DARKNESS
NOW LADY MECHANIKA
MORE WWW.JOEBENITEZ.COM

Comic Heroes: Tell us about Lady Mechanika and her world.

Joe Benitez: Lady Mechanika is a paranormal investigator in an alternative, steampunk vision of Victorian England. At a young age she was found locked up in a facility filled with biological and mechanical parts; her arms and legs were replaced with mechanical limbs but to date she doesn't know why this was done to her or who did it. She has no memory of who she was prior to her augmentations. Over the years she has come across various supernatural elements in her world and become well versed on the subject, so much so that the authorities turn to her for help when faced with the supernatural or occult. All this circles the story of Lady Mechanika's past, which is her driving force and the ultimate mystery of the book.

> When I started drawing female-centric comics, my fanbase literally doubled

CH: Why choose steampunk for a creator-owned project like this?

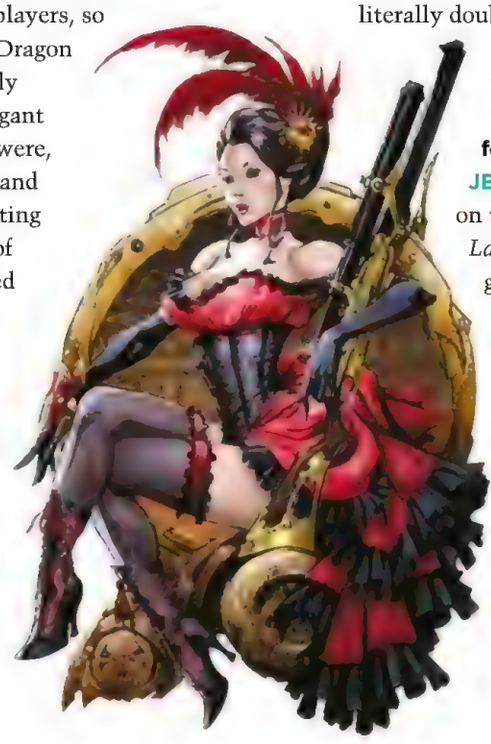
JB: I was attracted to the visuals and iconography of steampunk at a Dragon Con in Atlanta back in 2009. Steampunkers had been a part of the convention landscape for years, but they were in the background in amongst Klingons, Jedi and all the other cosplayers, so I paid them no mind. At Dragon Con they were particularly noticeable; I saw how elegant and classy the costumes were, and the amount of detail and effort that went into creating them was nothing short of amazing. It really captured my imagination.

That got my noodle going and I started developing my steampunk book for the next year.

CH: You've made a name creating books with strong female leads, such as your previous creator-owned series *Wraithborn* and now *Lady Mechanika*. What is it that interests you as a creator, writing and drawing female-led stories?

JB: Both *Wraithborn* and *Lady Mechanika* have a very strong, loyal female following and I want to cater to them by making not just cool female characters but strong, believable ones too. I also felt that there was a lack of strong heroines out there.

Secondly, I enjoy drawing females and I found that my depictions of women gained more attention than my men. When I started drawing female-centric comics, my fanbase literally doubled.



Below: Victorian elegance, steampunk tech, a touch of "good girl" style, all lovingly rendered... Who could resist the combination?

CH: What's next for Lady Mechanika and for you?

JB: We are hard at work on the next instalment of *Lady Mechanika*. If all goes well, it should be out next spring.

We are also working on re-releasing a creator owned series I did back in 2005 called *Wraithborn*. This new version, called *Wraithborn Redux*,

ALL IMAGES © 2015 JOE BENITEZ

will be in an altered, remastered edition where we plan on taking out some scenes, adding new ones as well as extending and touching-up others. There were things in the original release of the book I was never entirely happy with and now I can go back and give it the George Lucas treatment. Maybe I'll add a scene where Greedo shoots first!

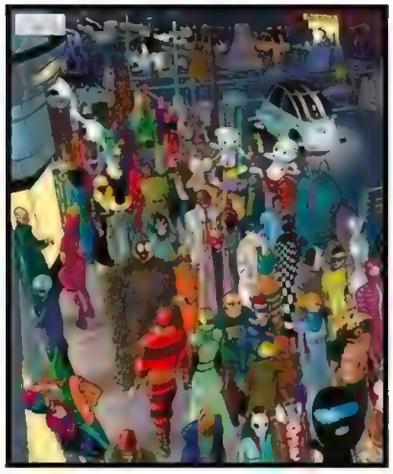
Above: Fans relish the attention lavished on the details of the alternative Victorian world in which *Lady Mechanika* is set.

CH: You've worked on some very successful books in the past: *The Darkness* and *Magdalena* for Top Cow as well as *JLA* and *Detective Comics* for DC. What characters or series would you like to work on?
JB: Well, with the caveat that I had full creative control over the story and art, I'd love to draw Batman, Spider-Man or G.I. Joe.

CH: You got your big break as part of a talent hunt for new artists at Marc Silvestri's Top Cow studios. Some of those artists have styles very similar to Marc's. Was it important for you to develop your own style, right off the bat?
JB: I felt I already had my own style by the time I broke into comics, but I was learning so much from Marc and his style was so popular that I did feel I had to mimic it somewhat and I did end up incorporating some elements of his work here and there. Ultimately I was never that type of artist – I'm not an artist who can "render" a piece, which was Marc's and some of those other guys' style. That part of Marc's influence was a struggle for me until my own style developed enough that I could I eliminate it from my work.

CH: Marc is considered an "artist's artist" and credited with nurturing the talents of David Finch and Michael Turner, to name but two. What key lessons did you learn from Silvestri and do any of those stick with you now?
JB: Have fun and kick ass! CH

MARCOS MARTÍN



The artist and co-creator of the Eisner Award winning digital comic *The Private Eye* gives **Alex Thomas** the lowdown on the series and its new print edition from Image Comics

BORN BARCELONA, SPAIN
HIGH DOCTOR STRANGE: THE OATH, DAREDEVIL
NOW THE PRIVATE EYE
MORE PANELSYNDICATE.COM

Comic Heroes: Congratulations on winning the 2015 Eisner Award for Best Digital Comic for *The Private Eye*. How important has that been for you?

Marcos Martín: It's important in the sense that anything that gets the word out that we exist is good. For us any kind of promotion is good and that is what awards really mean – it really promotes the book to people who don't already know about it or haven't had the chance to see it.

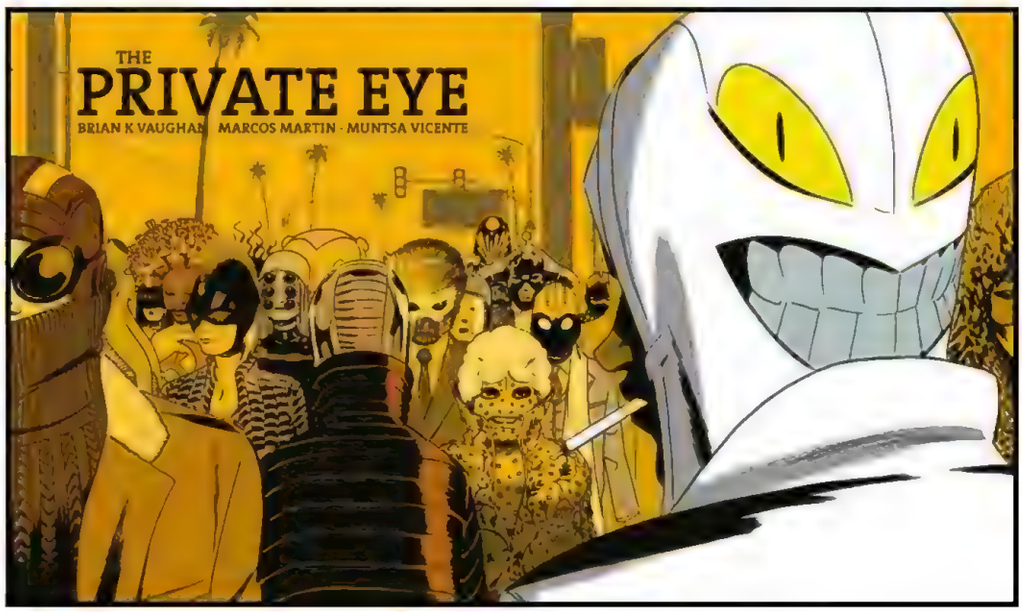
CH: *The Private Eye* is released via your "Pay What You Want" digital platform The Panel Syndicate (www.panelsyndicate.com), so which came first, and how did you and Brian K Vaughan come up with the idea of releasing a comic in this way?

MM: They were two separate ideas that met the moment Brian and I decided to come together and make a comic book. Brian told me about his idea for *The Private Eye* and the original intent was to put it out as an Image limited series, but I had been thinking about this idea for a digital distribution kind of thing for a while, and so I told Brian about it. He told me I was absolutely crazy and decided to go for it too. Which I guess makes two crazy people.

CH: *The Private Eye* mixes science-fiction with crime noir. What were the influences behind it?

MM: Well, I always think of *The Private Eye* as more of a noir series rather than science fiction. I guess it's a kind of retro science. I looked to the 1940s and 1950s but also to the 1980s and tried to get a mix of that. I'm a big fan of the movies from the '40s and '50s but I didn't want it to be too much of a homage or a throwback to those because that's been done so much already. I didn't want it to look too much like an old '40s or '50s movie but [like] the future, so the '80s appeal was kind of a bigger influence to me. Basically [it's] because we're talking about a future where there's no Internet, which to me is the '80s.

CH: For a dystopian story the series has a very bright and vibrant colour palette. Was that part of the plan to make it look less like classic noir?



This page: After the internet collapses and all your secrets are revealed, how do you regain any privacy? Secret identities for all!

MM: It was definitely part of the concept of the series. And it is thanks to [colorist] Muntsa Vicente. I don't think she is able to colour with a different kind of palette. She likes bright vibrant colours, so that works fine for her. I definitely wanted the future to be colourful and vibrant because it's a future where everyone is wearing disguises and it's LA. The only character that is not wearing vibrant colours is PI, who is always black-and-white. I always wanted to keep the character in very muted colours while everyone else should be living in this bright future.

CH: In *The Private Eye*, as a result of the internet collapsing and revealing people's secrets to the world, all the characters wear masks to create disguises. How did this idea come about?

MM: The idea was that people had to abandon their virtual identities to take on actual physical disguises. They couldn't hide in the form of virtual avatars, so they had to create own physical avatars. They would use that to protect their identities and their secrets, and that is what society has come to. That's very much part of Brian's premise from the beginning.

The key part for me was to try to understand exactly how to make those disguises work so that they wouldn't feel like we are at a carnival the whole time or a costume party.

Above: As is true in all the best SF – and noir fiction – the world of *The Private Eye* is compelling and meticulously realised.

CH: So which was your favourite of the masked characters to draw?

MM: The tiger mask [of Taj from issue #1] was fun to draw. I like the ones I only had to draw once. The ones in the background are usually fun to come up with and those are the ones that I enjoy the most. The one that I am most happy with is PI's as it's the one I draw the most.

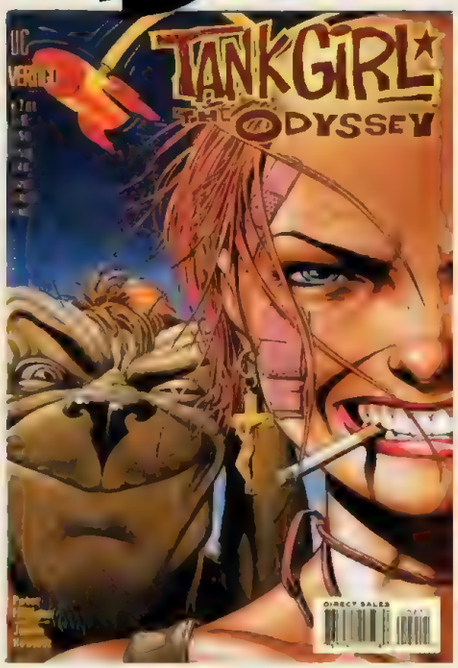
CH: You're about to release a print edition of *The Private Eye* from Image Comics. Are there any changes you have made for this new format?

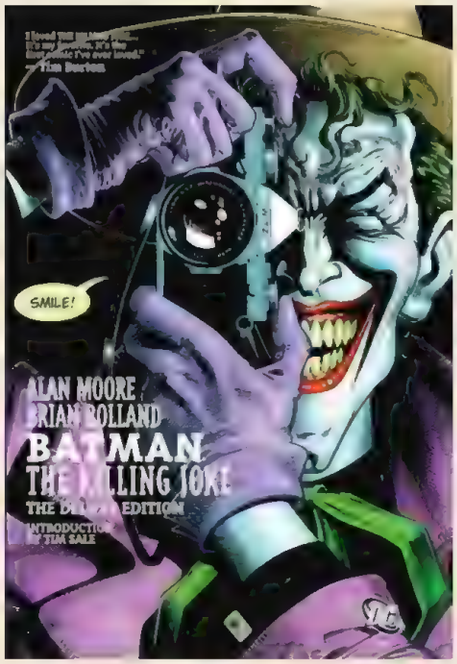
> It's more noir than SF but I didn't want it to look like a '40s or '50s movie

MM: It was created to be digital only because we didn't think it would ever get to be in print. I made the choice to use the landscape format to fit computer screens, [and although] it's been difficult to make the print version like that, I knew from the beginning that it had to be presented in a way that would work.

Cover Stars

BRIAN BOLLAND





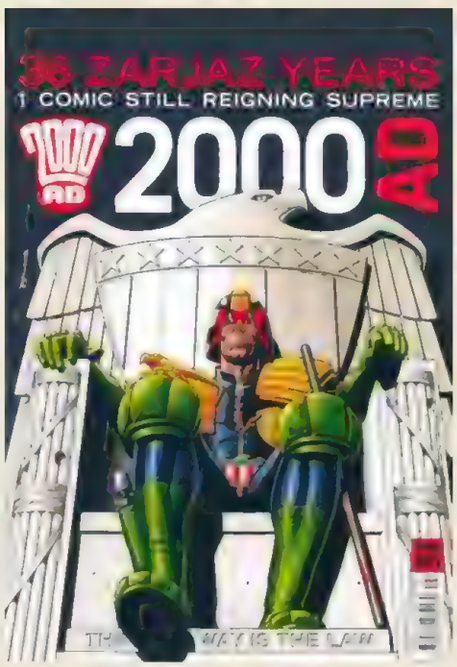
He drew one of the most enduring comic covers ever in "The Killing Joke", but there's much more to Brian Bolland's work than just superheroes.

A skilled writer and artist, he cut his teeth on British strips like *Powerman*, *House Of Hammer* and *2000 AD*, where he became a defining *Judge Dredd* artist.

In 1979 America came calling and, starting with the cover for *Green Lantern* #127, he began to produce numerous interiors and covers for DC, including *Camelot 3000* – the first "maxi-series".

> "BOLLAND REMAINS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS GLORIOUS COVERS FOR DC"

The Killing Joke was a hit and resulted in many offers of work, but Bolland didn't want to commit to a long run, so he took on various cover assignments, including *Animal Man*, *Wonder Woman*, *The Invisibles* and, recently, the likes of *Dial H*. He has worked for Marvel and Dark Horse, but he remains best known for his glorious covers for DC.



JOIN US AS
WE CELEBRATE
DC'S FINEST
HEROES

DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME?

BATMAN AND SUPERMAN ARE THE MOST ICONIC SUPERHEROES IN THE WORLD, AND THEIR FIRST MEETING HAS BEEN VISITED AND REVISITED AND RE-REVISITED AGAIN AND AGAIN, AS **WILL SALMON** EXPLAINS...

It's hard to believe now, in this age of constant comic crossovers, but there was a time when characters more-or-less existed in their own worlds – except, perhaps, in the pages of *All Star Comics*.

It's probably no surprise that two of the first characters to blaze the team-up trail were the twin gods of DC: Superman and Batman. As many have pointed out over the years, the two characters share many qualities: a love of justice, a deep-seated compassion and a refusal to kill. But they have many differences too – both are orphans, but just look at how differently they experienced tragedy. One grew up rich but alone, the other poor but surrounded by a loving family. One is a shadowy avenger, the other a sunny, cheerful sort. They are yin and yang. Night and day. The Caped Crusader and the Man of Steel.

With personalities as big – and as commercially successful – as these, it was always going to be just a matter of time before some bright spark had the idea of putting them in the same room together. But how did the characters first meet? Did they get along? As it turns out, there's no simple answer to that. In fact, the two have met for the very first time on numerous occasions. It all started way back in 1941...

Main image: The big event, New 52 style. *Batman/Superman #1* cover by Jae Lee with June Chung.

IMAGES © 2016 DC COMICS

1941

ALL STAR COMICS #7

$1,000,000 FOR WAR ORPHANS

WRITER: GARDNER FOX / ARTIST: EVERETT E. HIBBARD

This is slightly different from the other entries in this feature, but it was a necessary inclusion. Why? Because even though the characters clearly know each other in the story at this point (so not a first meeting), this is the very first time that we see Batman and Superman share the pages of a comic. The Green Lantern has a pang of guilt about some war orphans, so the Justice Society pledge to raise money to help them, and Bats and Supes take part. Hardly a big adventure, but just look at how glum those orphans look!

NO. 7 OCT.-NOV.
ALL STAR Comics
10¢
THE JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA RAISES $1000000 FOR WAR ORPHANS!
SUPERMAN, BATMAN and THE FLASH!

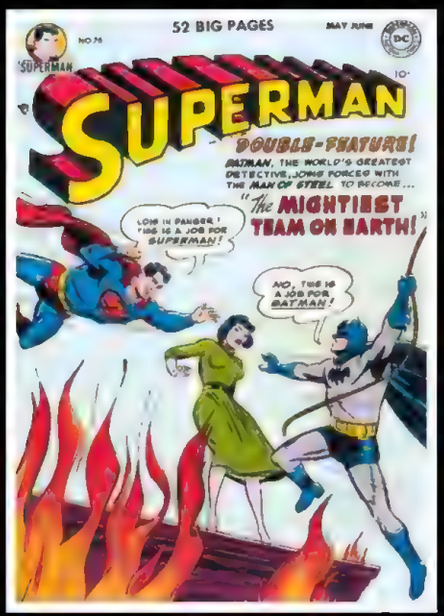
1952

SUPERMAN #76

THE MIGHTIEST TEAM IN THE WORLD

WRITER: EDMOND HAMILTON / ARTIST: CURT SWAN

The first proper meeting... You never know who you might meet on holiday. In Clark Kent's case he ends up sharing a room on a luxury cruise ship with Bruce Wayne (though why the millionaire doesn't kick off about being roomed with a reporter is a bit of a mystery). When a fire endangers Lois's life, the two set aside their differences and get to work. A final twist comes at the end of the issue when Lois – implausibly – agrees to a date with Robin.


52 BIG PAGES
SUPERMAN
SUPERMAN
DOUBLE-FEATURE!
BATMAN, THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE, JOINS FORCES WITH THE MAN OF STEEL TO BECOME...
"The MIGHTIEST TEAM ON EARTH!"
LOIS IN DANGER! THIS IS A JOB FOR SUPERMAN!
NO, THIS IS A JOB FOR BATMAN!

1956

WORLD'S FINEST COMICS #84

THE SUPER-MYSTERY OF METROPOLIS

WRITER: EDMOND HAMILTON / ARTIST: CURT SWAN

Small-time crook Thad Linnis blackmails Superman by threatening to reveal his secret identity unless he vanishes. With Supes gone, it's down to his bestie, Batman, to figure out what's going on. The tale then flashes back to the Smallville era, where we see Clark dealing with a troublesome snoop who is trying to figure out his secret identity. It turns out to be a very young Bruce Wayne honing his detective skills, meaning that the two first met years ago.

Giant 3000 PRIZE CONTEST!
WORLD'S FINEST COMICS
Your favorite heroes, SUPERMAN and BATMAN Together
"The SUPER-MYSTERY of METROPOLIS!"
SUPERMAN MISSING!
BATMAN, YOU AND ROBIN ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN FIND OUT WHAT'S HAPPENED TO SUPERMAN!

"POWERMAN IS REALLY A ROBOT"

YOUR TWO FAVORITE HEROES
SUPERMAN and BATMAN AND ROBIN
IN ONE ADVENTURE Together!
THE ORIGIN OF THE SUPERMAN-BATMAN TEAM

10¢
Adventure COMICS
featuring "THE ORIGIN OF THE SUPERMAN-BATMAN TEAM!"
1960
1961
1962
SEE, BRUCE? MY TIME TELESCOPE LOOKS INTO THE FUTURE. ONE DAY YOU, BRUCE WAYNE, WILL BE BATMAN AND I, CLARK KENT, WILL BE SUPERMAN!
OH, SUPERBOY! WE'LL BOTH KNOW EACH OTHER'S SECRET IDENTITIES AND FIGHT CRIME TOGETHER!

SUPERBOY
BATMAN, IT'S TIME TO REVEAL OUR SECRET...THE "TRAGEDY THAT BROUGHT US TOGETHER WHEN WE WERE KIDS...
THOMAS WAYNE
HOW THE BOY BECAME THE BATMAN
THE AMAZING TOTS OF SMALLVILLE

1958

WORLD'S FINEST #94

THE ORIGIN OF THE SUPERMAN-BATMAN TEAM

WRITER: EDMOND HAMILTON
ARTIST: DICK SPRANG

Third time's the charm? Six years after he penned their original "first meeting", Edmond Hamilton takes a third run at it. This time we see Batman and Robin flash back to their absolutely *definitely* real first mission with Superman. Concerned by Lex Luthor arming his gang with Kryptonite, they offer their services to Clark – only to be rebuffed because he has a new ally: Powerman (no, not *that* one). It all turns out to be a long con: Powerman is a robot that Superman has created to keep his super-buds from harm.

1960

ADVENTURE COMICS #275

THE ORIGIN OF THE SUPERMAN-BATMAN TEAM!

WRITER: JERRY COLEMAN
ARTIST: GEORGE PAPP

Just two years later and DC were at it again – and, yes, they even used the same title. Superboy meets Bruce Wayne when Bruce moves into Smallville with his – still living! – parents (later sensibly retconned by Roy Thomas as being his foster folks). Here Bruce creates his first crime-fighting personality. With the help of Lana Lang, he becomes... wait for it... the Flying Fox! Bruce also cottons on to Superboy's secret identity pretty quickly, making this a whole tangle of weird continuity.

1972

SUPERBOY #182

THE FORGING OF YOUNG BATMAN!

WRITER: LEO DORFMAN
ARTIST: BOB BROWN

More a retcon of Batman's origin than a first meeting, this refers to Clark and Bruce having met before, but Bruce has no idea of Clark's secret identity thanks to a memory wipe. Superboy discovers the truth about the death of the Waynes and so visits Bruce, who's already fighting crime under the ominous name of The Executioner. It plays fast and loose with continuity – Bruce is a teenager when his parents die, and Superboy is pivotal in Batman's evolution – and so was mostly ignored even before *Crisis* wiped the slate.

1986

THE MAN OF STEEL #3

ONE NIGHT IN GOTHAM CITY

WRITER: JOHN BYRNE / ARTIST: JOHN BYRNE

In the mid-'80s, *Crisis On Infinite Earths* rewrote 50 years of DC continuity in one fell swoop. So it was only a matter of time before a new first encounter came along. "One Night In Gotham City" is murkier than previous attempts. Batman is chasing down Magpie when he comes face to face with Superman, who regards him as little more than a vigilante thug. While they part on peaceable terms, there's a clear disagreement over each other's methods.

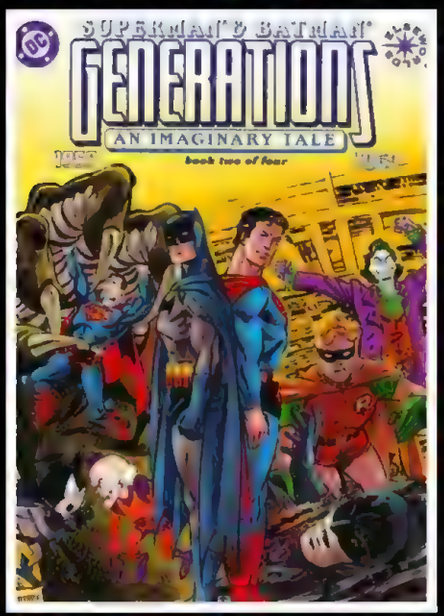
1999

SUPERMAN & BATMAN: GENERATIONS

THE VIGILANTES

WRITER: JOHN BYRNE / ARTIST: JOHN BYRNE

This non-canonical Elseworlds story follows the lives of the young Bruce and Clark as they grow into their roles as costumed heroes. It's 1939 and Bruce Wayne is visiting the Metropolis World's Fayre when the Ultra-Humanite attacks. Once again it's Lois's imperilment that brings Bruce and Clark together.



2003

SUPERMAN/BATMAN: SECRET FILES & ORIGINS 2003

WHEN CLARK MET BRUCE: A TALE FROM THE DAYS OF SMALLVILLE

WRITER: JEPH LOEB / ARTIST: TIM SALE

A cute short that finds the young – and recently orphaned – Bruce Wayne passing through Smallville, when his car breaks down. Nearby, Clark Kent and his pal Pete Ross are playing baseball. They don't physically meet, but Clark notices the sad young boy in the car and wonders if he should have asked him to join in their game.

"BRUCE IS SLUMMING IT UNDERCOVER"

2012

JUSTICE LEAGUE #1

JUSTICE LEAGUE, PART 1

WRITER: GEOFF JOHNS
ARTIST: JIM LEE

"One Night In Gotham" stood for a good long time, but in 2011, following the cataclysmic "Flashpoint" storyline, DC revamped all of its titles. Controversially, out went decades of continuity, in favour of a fresh start (again). And you know what that means... Yep, another first meeting for Bats and Supes, and another chance for the two to fall out and immediately scrap. Interestingly, the New 52 Batman wasn't alone when he met Superman for the first time – he had backup from Green Lantern. Not that he was of much use against Big Blue...

2012

SMALLVILLE SEASON 11 COMIC

DETECTIVE, PART ONE

WRITER: BRYAN Q. MILLER
ARTIST: CHRIS CROSS

It's not in the regular DC continuity, but it's still a comic... Frustrating not-quite-*Buffy* TV series *Smallville* eked out Clark Kent's origin story for ten long years but somehow never got around to introducing Bruce Wayne. With the TV show out of the picture, the official "Season 11" comic, however, did. Batman is hunting down his parents' killer – literally, this time – when he encounters Clark. As first meetings go, it doesn't exactly augur well – Batman decks Superman – but they're soon working side-by-side.

2013

BATMAN/SUPERMAN #1

CROSS WORLD

WRITER: GREG PAK
ARTIST: JAE LEE

Which brings us bang up to date. In the New 52 *Batman/Superman* #1, the two meet again for the first time. Bruce is slumming it undercover, while Clark is investigating the deaths of a group of Wayne Enterprises employees. They're both young crime-fighters at this point (Supes in his controversial jeans and t-shirt ensemble) and they don't quite see eye-to-eye, but the story sets up the start of what will become a beautiful friendship well. We look forward to learning how they met for the first time again (and again?) in years to come. CH

FLYING INTO ACTION

STAND BY FOR ACTION AS **WILL SALMON** TALKS TO **AARON KUDER**, THE ARTIST CURRENTLY DEPICTING SUPERMAN IN THE PREMIER SUPER-BOOK

Main image: Kuder has taken Superman and made him his own.

Aaron Kuder has had a relatively short comics career to date, going pro only in 2010, but he's made a real impact. He's drawn numerous covers for DC, including high-profile titles like *Batman* and *Lobo*. But it's his ongoing work on *Action Comics* that has really raised his profile. Two years into an ongoing collaboration with Greg Pak, his work has brought an elegance and authenticity to the Man of Steel that echoes Frank Quitely and Neal Adams but with his own unique style. With *Action* approaching its landmark 50th issue, which Aaron describes as "the pinnacle moment of a lot of the stuff we've been working towards", he took the time out to reflect on the journey so far.

COMIC HEROES: Are you enjoying the *Action Comics* experience?
AARON KUDER: It's been a complete blast! Before *Action*, I didn't have a whole lot of history behind me. It's one of the first books I was really >

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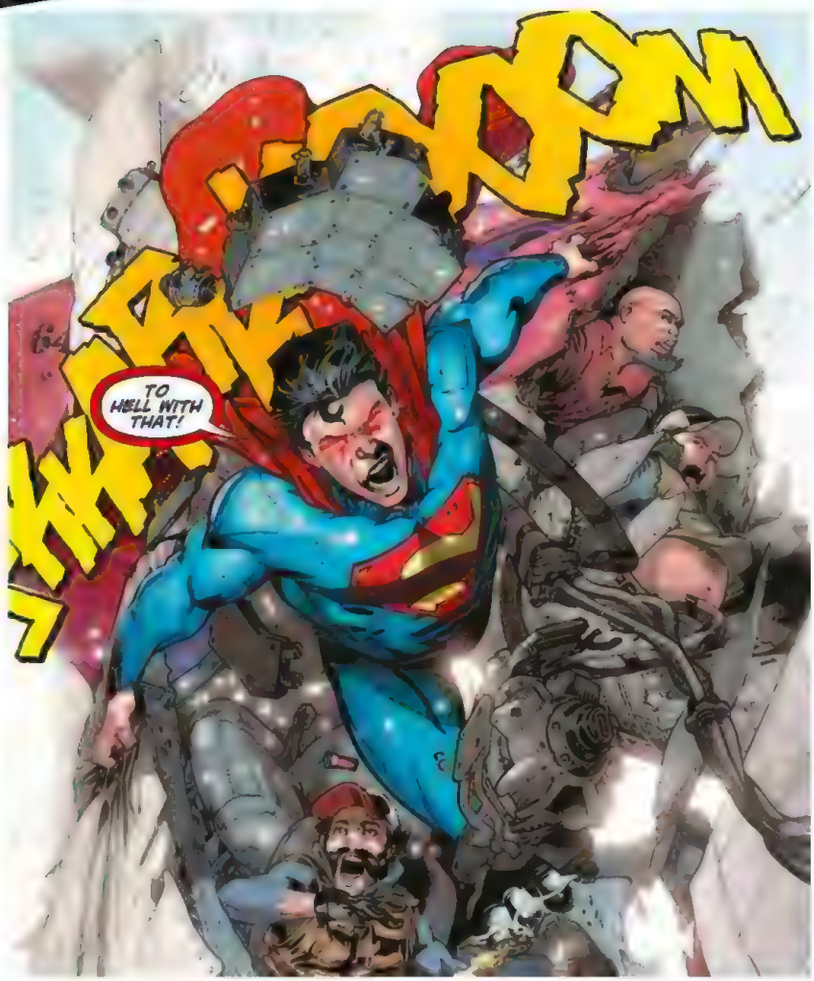


"YOU TAKE THE HURDLES AND USE THEM TO MAKE THE STORY BETTER"

AND WHEN I TOUCH IT, EVERYTHING SUDDENLY MAKES A
IT FEELS DIFFERENT.
IT FEELS RIGHT.
AS FAR AS WE CAN TELL, IT CAN'T BE TORN.
WHOEVER WRAPPED YOU IN IT REALLY LOVED YOU.
LOVE?
FROM THE PARENTS WHO WRAPPED ME IN THE
AND THE PARENTS WHO SAVED IT FOR ME.

able to take on and make my own with a long run. It's hard to argue with the responses we've gotten, the feedback we've had, the positivity. Every day somebody chimes in with something. It's really been remarkable. *Action Comics* is the grandaddy of all superhero comics. Getting the job was the most humbling moment of my comics career.

CH: What does Superman mean to you? Did you read him as a kid?
AK: I think Superman was introduced to me in the same way that he was introduced to a lot of people. He was an icon before he was a character. You mention Superman to the 10-year-old version of me and the "bum-bumba-ba-bum" comes chiming into my mind to this day! That's both a blessing and a curse. DC redesigned him with the New 52 before I came on board. They were going with this fresher, newer Superman, and that made it a little more difficult to do the stories that we wanted to tell. But that's the nature of what comics are. You take the hurdles and use them to make the story better.

AK: What is it about Superman that makes him so enduring?
It's hard to separate the feelings from the reality. He's a fantasy representation of everything that we want to be as good people. Not just the flying and the powers, but also the idea that here is a person that does good, period. That's the bottom line. If there's a choice to be made then he's going to do his best to make sure it's the right one.

CH: He has a real decency to him that maybe some of the other characters lack...
AK: Which also makes him a harder character to make relatable. That's always been a huge challenge for us. That element of decency and of wanting to do what's right is kind of ingrained in all of us on some level, so we try to speak to that.

CH: How do you make an old character like Superman seem fresh and exciting again?
AK: It's tricky. Everybody that has drawn Superman has had their own take on how to make him fly through the air in the most iconic way that they can. For me it's all about capturing his more human moments. I think that both Greg and I see the character as Clark first and Superman second, as Clark is the more relatable side of the coin. There's a character that me and Greg introduced called Baka, who's a little monster boy. We thought, "yeah, this is a character who can help Superman really relate to both his superhuman side and his humanity". He's a character that needs protection but also, in some ways, doesn't need protection.

Left: Together, Pak and Kuder have filled *Action Comics* with absorbing tales and memorable characters as well as the slam-bang adventure promised in the title.

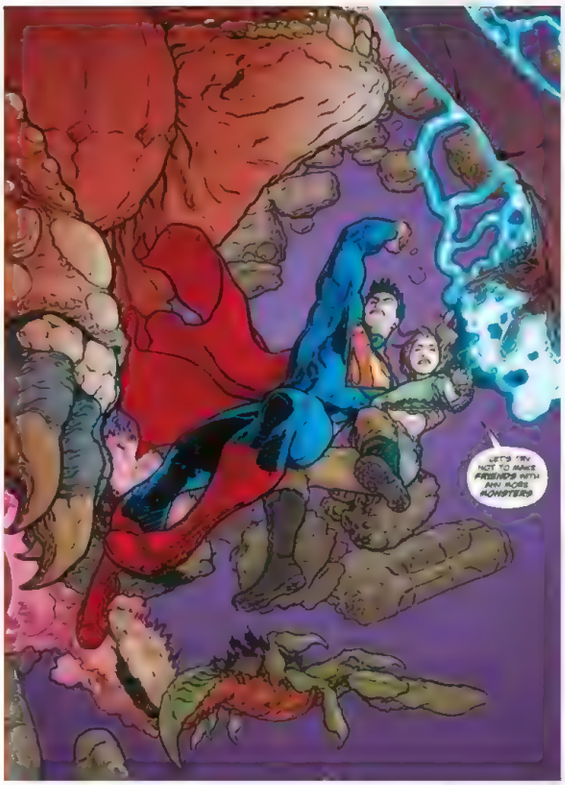
Above: Pak and Kuder find fresh stories to tell within the longest-established continuity

CH: You touched on the long history of artists who have worked on Superman. Do you have any personal favourites?
AK: You know, I wasn't all that familiar with Superman comics. I got into comics and started reading them right before *The Death Of Superman* and so that was really my introduction to – at the time – modern Superman. But as amazing as those comics were, I don't think they made too much of an impact on me, simply because I was a teenager that just wanted to see violence!

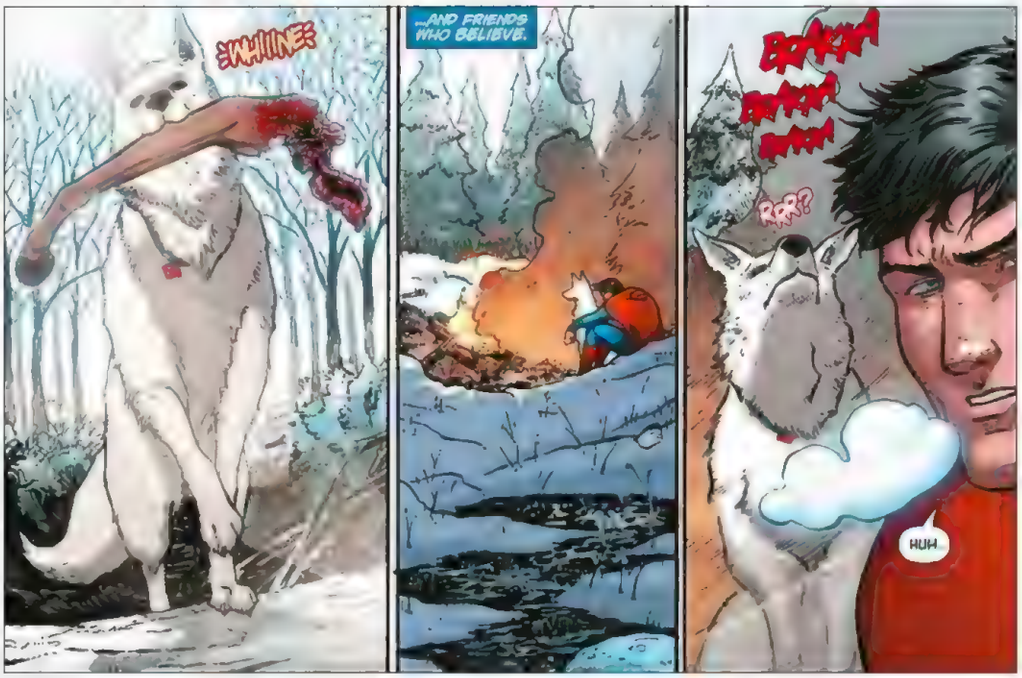
CH: How does your collaboration with Greg work?
AK: Well, we met a couple of years ago at a DC summit and I don't think either of us realised we'd be working together someday. Andy Diggle was originally going to be the writer on *Action Comics*. I wasn't really aware of his work – when you work in comics you often don't have time to actually *read* comics! There's a whole bunch of people who I have an absolute fanboy love for, but don't know who they are. So Andy and I were going to work together but then that didn't happen.

They asked me how I would feel about working with Greg and I was overjoyed. I was a huge fan of many of the things he has done in the past. It was like a second birthday! I couldn't imagine connecting with >

"I NEVER THOUGHT I'D DRINK THIS MUCH RED BULL IN MY LIFE"



YOU DON'T THINK I KNOW THAT?
THEN WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?
YOU'LL REGAIN YOUR CORPOREAL STATE IN A FEW SECONDS. FOR NOW, JUST LISTEN.



somebody that I admire so much. And that's how it's been for the last few years, with an underlying mutual respect for each other's points of view, and a trust in each other for the way that we want to tell a story.

CH: Am I right in thinking that recently you've started plotting the stories together?
AK: Correct, that started with issue 40 or 41. We talk about the whole arc beforehand and start nailing down ideas and then really flesh out the story. When we first started out, Greg would write a looser script which, in the beginning, would have vague descriptions of each panel. But as we've gone on it's become just vague descriptions of what goes on the page.

CH: Your co-plotting started with the "Truth" arc, which crossed over with all the other Superman books. Was it tough coordinating all these different creative teams?
AK: Yes and no. I've written a couple of books before – I wrote *Superboy* and a *Parasite* one-shot for Villains month – but I'd never done a big group crossover before. The edict was to have all of our Superman books happening at the same time in the same place, so that any reader could pick up one book and realise that this character is here and that's what's going on, rather than going, 'Oh, why's he in outer space over there?'

That was the original intent, and then it turned into this kind of strange crossover idea and it was really fascinating to me, working with the other writers and having these writer pow-wows with Gene Yang and Pete Tomazi. It was really great because each one of us had a completely different background or point of view of what they wanted to bring to the character. Our intent was to answer the question "If Superman didn't have everything that he has, would he still choose to be Superman?" And of course the answer to that is yes, but the way that each of us came up with different solutions to that question was really fun.

CH: What's a working day look like for you?
AK: Generally at the beginning of the issue I try to work through normal daytime hours, but as the deadline gets closer and closer it turns into a kind of nocturnal spoof of a comic book artist. I never thought I'd drink this much Red Bull in my life...

Left: Pak and Kuder have explored both Clark Kent and Superman, and the relationship between the two, but Kuder is also a master of iconic action.

Above: A recurring thread in *Action Comics* is Clark/Superman's essential *humanity*.

CH: And what tools do you use?
AK: I've never been someone to choose one medium over another. It's all tools. Several hundred years ago the great masters of art would probably look at people with tubes of paint and think 'Oh, you cheater'. I use whatever I can: photo references, computer programs – I'm currently doodling on a Cintiq. But there's no replacement for the feel of paper. There is something holy there.

CH: Did you use a photo reference for Superman?
AK: *[Laughs]* Yes... My brother. I've always thought of him. He's much shorter than I am, but because of his bone structure and stuff, I've always thought that he was a dead ringer for what Supes would look like. So of course everybody that sees me draw Clark immediately thinks that I'm drawing myself as a brunette. We have similar bone structure, but he's a brunette and I'm a redhead. Or a ginger, as some would say. And proud!

CH: We can't mention Superman without Batman. What are your thoughts on the Caped Crusader?
AK: Batman's great. He's never been somebody that I have a huge desire to draw but he's one of those characters that's interesting and complex enough that, no matter what the setting, he can fuel a really beautiful story. He has enough personal issues and angst. That's why it's harder to tell more universal stories with Superman. People see his invulnerability and immediately think, "Well, he's not in any mortal danger..." But that's the challenge of telling the story. CH

ENTERING THE ENDGAME

AFTER FIVE YEARS AND COUNTLESS ADVENTURES, STALWART BATMAN ARTIST **GREG CAPULLO** IS DEPARTING DC'S FLAGSHIP TITLE. **DAVID BARNETT** FINDS OUT WHY, AND WHAT THE CHARACTER MEANS TO HIM...

Main image: Capullo readily admits that the world of his Batman is influenced by Frank Miller's take in *The Dark Knight Returns*.

Greg Capullo has been part of the main *Batman* title creative team, as artist alongside writer Scott Snyder, since 2011's New 52 reboot. The pair have presided over arguably some of the most iconic storylines in the character's recent history, introducing the Court of Owls, a secret society that in the background has controlled Gotham City for centuries and, in the "Endgame" arc, depicting the apparent deaths of the two central characters in the whole Batman mythos – Bruce Wayne and the Joker.

Currently, Snyder and Capullo's *Batman* has Commissioner James Gordon beneath the famous cowl. Now the New York based artist is set to leave the book, although perhaps only temporarily, in 2016.

Comic Heroes caught up with Greg Capullo to talk about his years on *Batman* and what comes next for the 53-year-old artist, whose CV also includes Marvel's *X-Force* and Todd McFarlane's *Spawn*.

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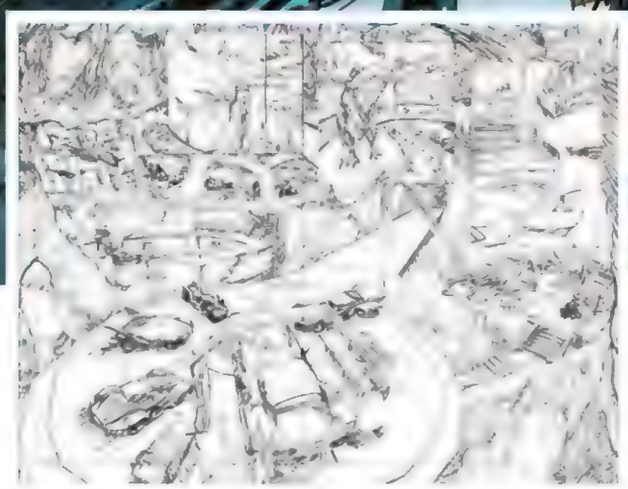
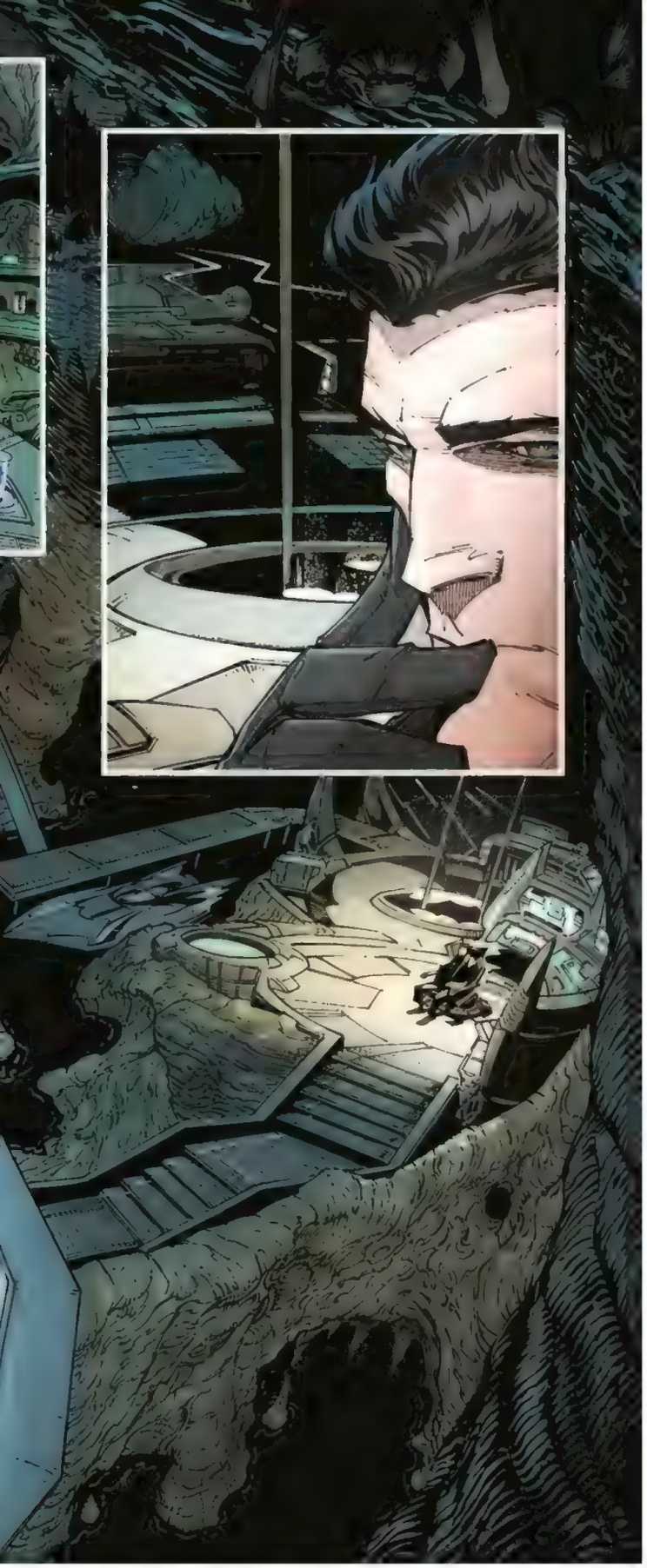


"EVER SINCE I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD I KNEW I WANTED TO DRAW SUPERHERO COMICS"



Comic Heroes: You're based in New York state. How is it since DC moved their operations across the country to California?
Greg Capullo: I live in Albany, upstate New York, a place called Guilderland. It does feel a little bizarre now that DC have gone to California, not being able to see their offices when I go into New York City.

CH: So, drawing Batman. Every artist's dream, right?
GC: Absolutely! I tell you, my mother still has a Batman drawing I did when I was just four years old. That's how long I've been into Batman. My earliest drawings I did as a kid were always of Batman, so naturally I feel pretty blessed that I'm drawing him professionally now. There's just something so special about him… Batman is this character who doesn't bow to anyone. I've never met anyone who says "I don't care for the Batman" – he's instantly recognisable the world over.

CH: Did you always want to break into comics?
GC: Ever since I was eight years old I knew I wanted to draw superhero comics. Well, there were two ambitions I had, really. One was to draw superhero comics and the other was to work on *Mad* magazine. I was crazy for *Mad* magazine when I was a kid. I loved the work of artists such as Sergio Aragonés. My first comics work was a horror comic called *Gore Shriek*, then I got picked up by Marvel and did work on *X-Force* and *Quasar*. Todd McFarlane saw my work on *X-Force*, and when he set up Image Comics he brought me on board to pencil *Spawn*. I did a few other projects and had a little hiatus from comic work before starting work on *Batman*.

CH: You seem a pretty no-nonsense guy. How well do you get on with *Batman* writer Scott Snyder? How do you divide up the storytelling approach?
GC: *[Laughs]* Let me tell you something. It's great working with Scott Snyder but to be honest I didn't really get along with him too well right at the beginning. We basically have two entirely different approaches to creating comics. I was what you might call a real Marvel guy when it comes to comic storytelling. By that I mean that I was used to getting a plot synopsis that described the general story, I would interpret that and lay out the pages, and the writer would come back and script it afterwards.

CH: So you had a lot of freedom with Marvel titles?
GC: Absolutely, and even more so when I started working on *Spawn* – Todd McFarlane was even looser than that! I'd be told something like, "Yeah, gimme three pages of Sam and Twitch talking". He'd kind of tell me what they were discussing so I could get the tone right, and he might have said, "Oh, and leave me quite a bit of room in the last couple of panels because I want to get a lot of words in." So unless there were specific >

Main image and left: A glimpse at Capullo's tight pencilling for a complex layout.

Right: Capullo's *Batman* can always shock.

This page: Another striking composition meticulously worked out in the pencilling

requirements for a particular scene I would interpret the story as I thought best.

CH: And Scott Snyder doesn't work like that?
GC: Absolutely he doesn't! I was paired up with Scott for *Batman* and I got his first script… It was like 40 pages of text for a 22 page comic! He was saying how many panels there were to a page, exactly what was going on in each and every panel… I was like, what the hell is this!? I wasn't too happy, I can tell you. I said, "hey, the day a writer lets me put my words in the speech balloons is the day I let a writer tell me exactly how to draw my pictures on the page".

CH: So it sounds like a pretty shaky start…
GC: Yeah, you could say we butted heads a little. In fact, in those early days, it was quite serious. It was getting to the point where Scott was going to DC and I'm pretty sure he was ready to say "It's him or me on *Batman*".

CH: How did you react?
GC: At first I was like, yeah, whatever. But I'm older than Scott, I've travelled the roads of life. I think once Scott saw that I wasn't going to ruin his baby, he started to relax. And the first time we got together he apologised for being a dick! *[Laughs.]* As I'm getting to be an older guy I suppose I'm more flexible these days. We sat down and I thought, hey, maybe it isn't right for me to make him change how he works too much, the same way as it isn't right to expect me to do things completely differently. So we worked it out and we compromised a little, I guess.

CH: So how does it work now?
GC: Pretty well – we have been doing it since 2011, so something must be working! Scott will write up the ideas and include the story beats in his scripts, often just for his own sake, so he knows how the story's working out. But there is more flexibility for me. I guess it does take me a little longer than I'm used to wade through all his script, but it's working well! But the great thing is now we both respect each other and love the character so much. We used to be oil and water. Now maybe we're oil and vinegar!

> "JIM GORDON IS PROBABLY MY FAVOURITE CHARACTER TO DRAW"

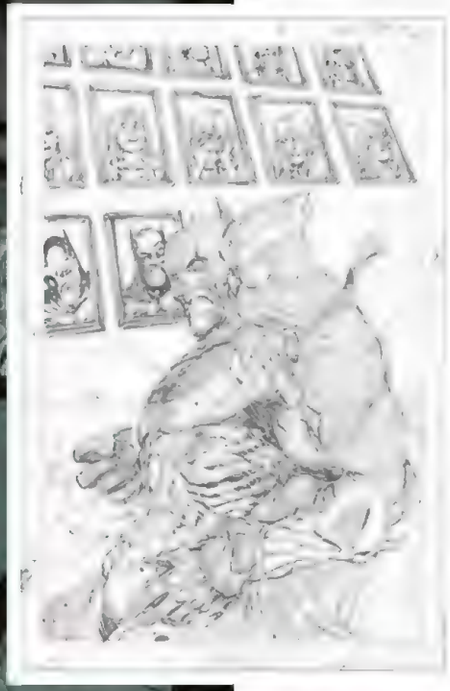
CH: Speaking of respecting the character… You've put Batman through quite a lot of changes over the years. As someone who's loved Batman since he was a four-year-old kid, how does it sit with you no longer having Bruce Wayne beneath the mask?
GC: If I could have chosen anyone to take on the mantle of Batman after Bruce Wayne, I would always have said Jim Gordon. He is probably my favourite character to draw and I like the character a lot. When we left it with "Endgame" we had to decide where to go from there, and decide who was going to be Batman. It had to be someone who the readers had a connection with, someone who had been with Batman since the beginning. We couldn't really put Alfred in the suit, but Gordon seemed like the natural choice. Batman and Gordon are already close and now Gordon knows exactly what it means to be Batman, having walked a mile in his boots, as it were.

CH: Whether it's Bruce Wayne or Jim Gordon in the suit, did you have firm ideas about how you wanted to draw Batman when you started on the book?
GC: Well, let me tell you, it feels like the books I work on tell me how to draw them, what style they need, and the characters themselves dictate to me how I'm supposed to handle them. That just feels natural. That said, I did have some ideas on how Batman was meant to look for me.

For starters, I knew I didn't want that kind of wrinkly cowl that you sometimes see. I wanted something sleeker, more helmet-like than fabric. I don't want you to see the lines under the mask, which means you've kind of got to show the emotion through the eyes. I took as my inspiration on that the original Frank Miller *Dark Knight Returns* mini-series. When Batman suits up to fight Superman… Oh man, that's what I wanted to get real close to.

CH: Your Batman's a pretty big guy, isn't he?
GC: Absolutely. It seems in some comics that every superhero, no matter what their powers, seems to have this physique that's just ready for a bodybuilding contest but with some kind of suit spray-painted over it. I don't think Batman necessarily has this athletic sort of build. I wanted Batman to be like a slab of meat, you know? He's not ripped to shreds, but he's big, he's thick, he's solid. He's got a shock-absorber of a neck, like a boxer, yeah? You ever come up against anyone built like that, you'll see just how dangerous it is!

It was funny but after I'd started drawing the *Batman* comic a friend pointed out that he looked a lot >



This page: Long-time fan though Capullo is, he and Snyder have done some pretty shocking things with Batman

> "THE GREAT THING ABOUT GOTHAM, YOU CAN PRETTY MUCH DO ANYTHING YOU WANT WITH IT"

Above: Long-time fan though Capullo is... You know the rest already.

like that old cartoon character from the 1960s, Space Ghost. And I looked at it and I thought, yeah, I didn't even realise that. But he's got the same build. He's like this big, immovable monolith, and you don't really want to go up against that.

CH: Gotham's always had an important role in the Batman mythos. How do you go about representing the city?
GC: The great thing about Gotham is that you can pretty much do anything you want with it. It's this kind of city that's got so much going on in it. It's this gothic place with more wild and interesting shapes than most real-life cities, a mix of styles. Wherever I am, I'll walk around the streets of some city and soak things up, spot buildings that look unusual and I'll think, yeah, I can use that for Gotham. It's a real mish-mash of shapes and buildings that I think I can use.

CH: But you've announced that you're leaving *Batman* in 2016! What's going on?
GC: We've been doing *Batman* together since 2011. A lot of guys jump around on different projects all the time, but I'm just not that guy. I get intimately familiar with my projects and invest a lot in them. I think that makes for a more intimate relationship with a book. And an artist can't take on too many different projects like a writer can. So this great opportunity came up and I decided it was time to do something else, in a kind of transition period.

CH: And this new project? You're working with Mark Millar next? Can you shed any light on that?
GC: We're doing a six-issue series, yeah. It's going to be really interesting. This is Millar's baby, so I'm not saying much about it until he's ready to talk about it. But I love his work and he's put out some great comics, so I'm pretty excited. I've been talking to Mark for a while and he's wanted to do work with me but up to now I've been on an exclusive contract with DC, so this is the perfect opportunity for me to do a new thing while we sort out what comes next with DC.

CH: So is it really farewell to *Batman*? And Scott Snyder?
GC: You'll have to wait and see on the *Batman* front! But after I've done the project with Mark Millar, me and Scott have another project lined up for DC, which is really pretty cool and a big project. It's a project that is perfectly timed, because it comes around after I've finished this big project with Mark, so yeah, me and Scott will be working together again! After that, and whether there'll be more *Batman*... Well, we need to figure out where we go from there, so we'll just have to wait and see...

THE ART OF BATMAN: JOHN ROMITA, JR

PLAYING WITH SHADOWS

HOW DO YOU FOLLOW UP ONE OF THE BEST-LOOKING COMICS IN HISTORY? **JOEL MEADOWS** TALKS TO **JOHN ROMITA JR** ABOUT THE DARK KNIGHT PREQUEL

John Romita Jr has spent most of his career as one of Marvel's top artists, drawing everything from the X-Men and Daredevil to Thor and Spider-Man. Then in 2014, surprising fans and industry watchers, he took on *Superman* for DC. He left that book earlier this year, but he isn't done with the Distinguished Competition yet: he was recently awarded the honour of drawing a prequel to *The Dark Knight Returns*, penned by Frank Miller and Brian Azzarello.

Entitled *The Last Crusade*, the 48-page special celebrates the 30th anniversary of Miller's classic by looking to the past and the events that led to Batman's retirement. We spoke to JR Jr to find out more about the project...

COMIC HEROES: When you took over Superman, you said you'd love to tackle Batman. Is the Dark Knight a character that you've always wanted to draw?

John Romita Jr: I think a lot of people have always wanted to draw Batman! There's something about the visuals that's just so iconic. It's a better costume than most, and you can add your own mood to it and you can play with all sorts of shadows. The visuals alone make him a fun character. Then, of course, you have his history. I have always wanted to give it a shot and now I have a shot – although I am not doing the modern version, I'm doing Frank Miller's Dark Knight.

CH: *The Dark Knight Returns* was such a phenomenon. Did you feel any trepidation stepping into Miller's shoes?

JR: The prequel is one thing, working on *The Dark Knight* itself is another. Because of the shadow that Frank does leave with the character, I'm not so concerned about the visuals, I am concerned more about the story and the storytelling because it is a heavy load to do something along the lines of the *Dark Knight* stories. I am actually embracing the chance

Main image: JR Jr promises to mix his dynamic style with the design and storytelling of Miller's *Dark Knight*.

to do that type of storytelling and that type of visual.

CH: Was it being a one-shot part of the appeal?
JR: Yes, I can see the series they will be publishing as being difficult. But this is very interesting and I hadn't considered this until they proposed it to me. Because maybe Frank can pull some "nudge nudge, wink wink" stuff and then Brian can add his genius to it. I am in a good spot because it is a single graphic novel. It is a little different from doing a series.

CH: What can you tell us about the plot?
JR: Because of the original *Dark Knight Returns*, one would imagine the prequel would look at what happened to Jason Todd, and that's pretty much all I can say…

CH: How is your approach to this different from your *Superman* run?
JR: The storytelling will be along the lines of *The Dark Knight Returns*. There will be the rapid-fire inset panels to keep things in that direction. I will have some room to play, but because of what *The Dark Knight Returns* looked like, they want to give it that flavour. So I am trying to bridge the gap between the two.

CH: What did you learn from your run on *Superman* as an artist?
JR: What I learned is that changing from one company to the next is not as traumatic as I imagined! I wasn't changing allegiances of countries, I was just changing characters. It's fun doing different characters all over the industry. I suddenly felt this freedom and thought "I'm having fun with this character too." It's pretty much the same business, the same job only in a different costume. I really enjoyed it. The guys at DC are spectacular people.

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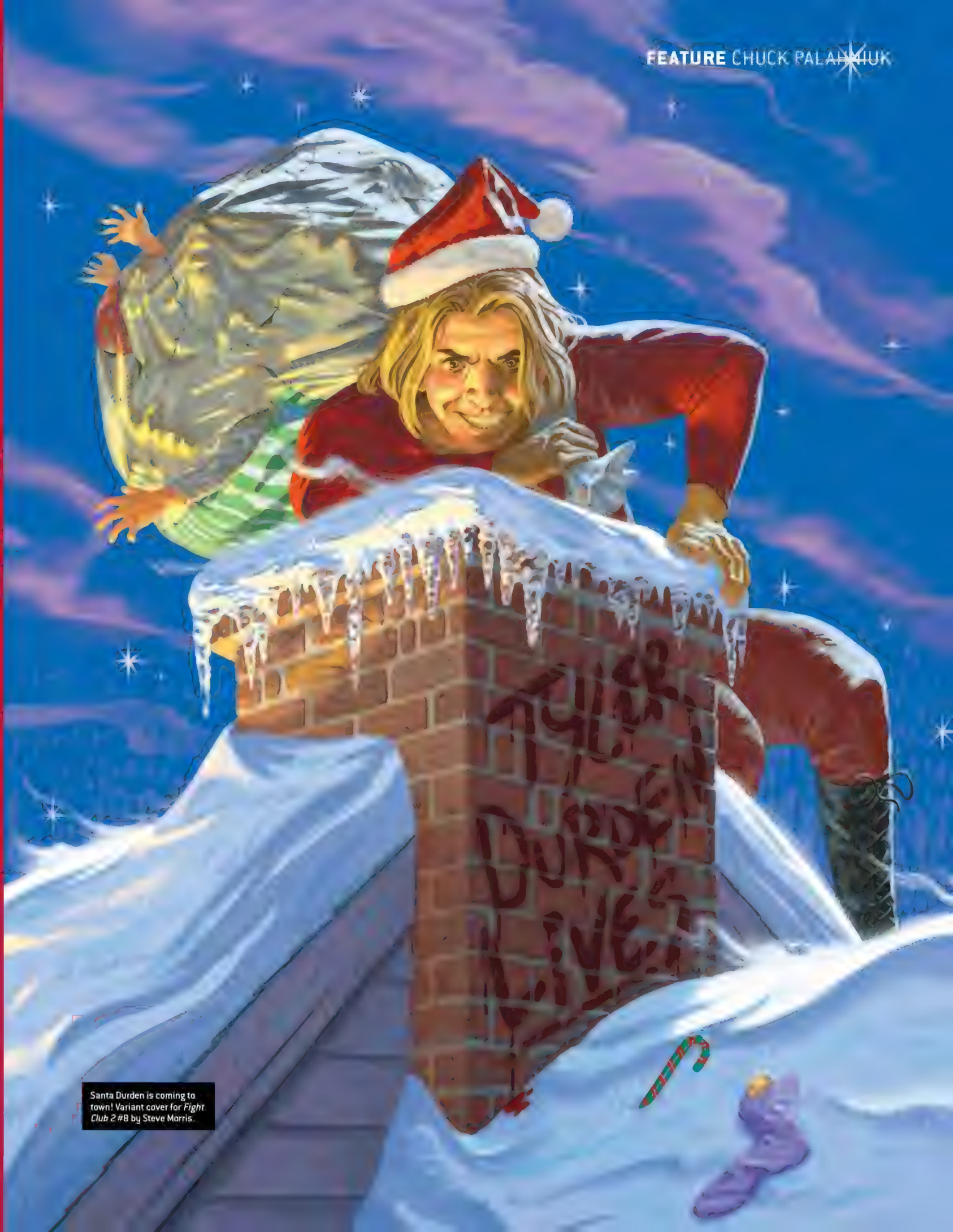
PULLING NO PUNCHES

CULT AUTHOR AND FIGHT CLUB CREATOR CHUCK PALAHNIUK TALKS TO WILL SALMON ABOUT WHY THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR TYLER DURDEN'S RETURN...

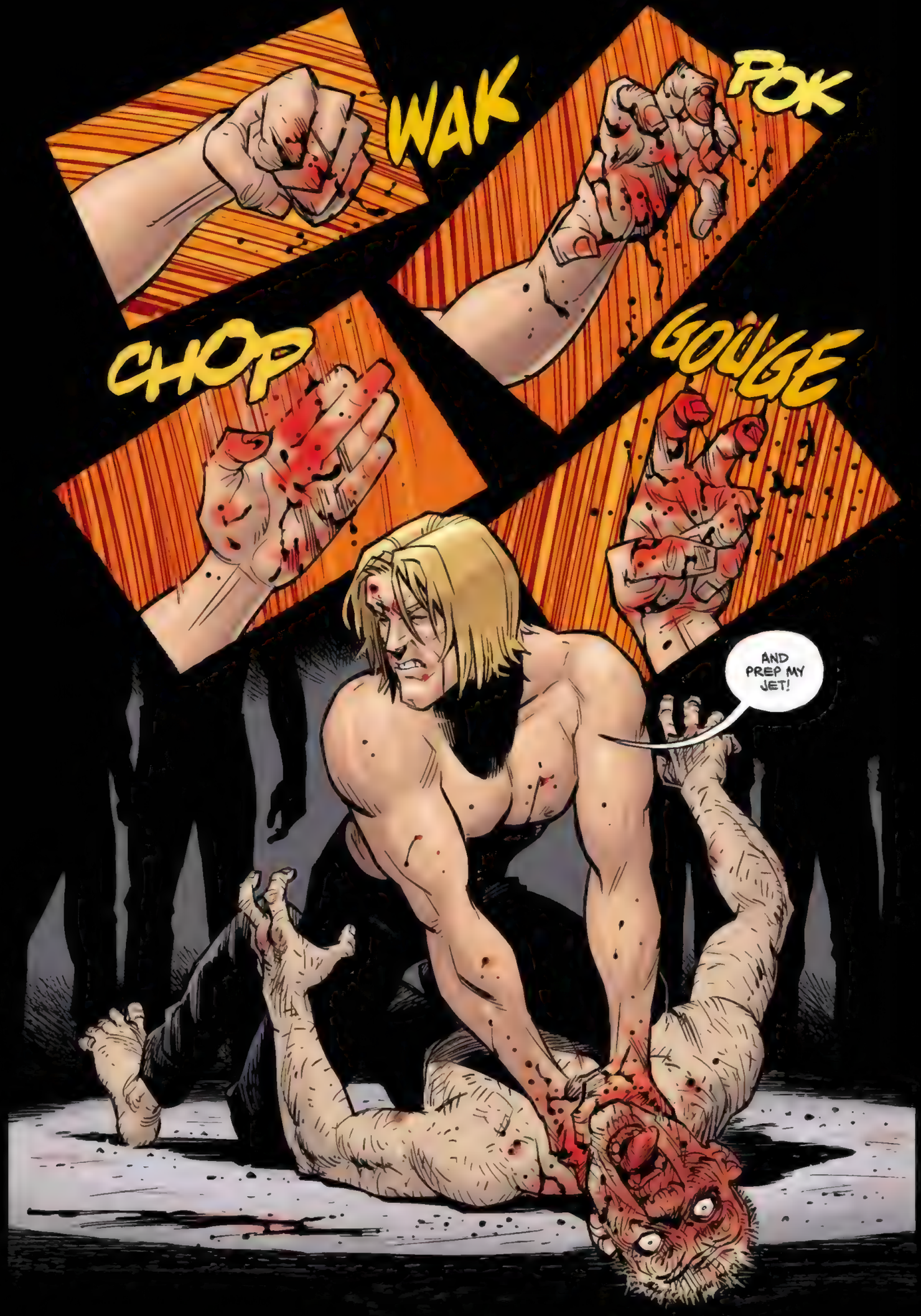
Chuck Palahniuk has something of a reputation. The author of 1996's *Fight Club* writes blisteringly bleak comedies that satirise contemporary life while pushing the boundaries of taste. That novel mixed anti-capitalism, underground fighting and soap made from human fat into a molotov cocktail of a novel that exploded across the culture at the turn of the millennium – aided by David Fincher's brilliant film adaptation, of which Palahniuk is a self-confessed fan.

It's no secret that *Fight Club* was based, in part, on real events that happened to Chuck and his friends. It kickstarted a career that has seen him publish works about serial killers; a man who may just be the Second Coming of Christ; a porno actress trying to break a world record (that we can't really go into here); and short stories, such as the infamous "Guts", that have been known to make people faint. An intimidating figure then? Perhaps, but when *Comic Heroes* catches up with him in September 2015, he's unfailingly pleasant, thoughtful and polite. Endearingly, he prefixes certain answers with a thoughtful, Jimmy Stewart-ish "Boy..."

In 2015 Palahniuk returned to his most famous creation, this time as a comic. *Fight Club 2* is a ten-issue series from Dark Horse that concludes this February, with a collected edition to follow. Written by Palahniuk and drawn by Cameron Stewart, the Eisner Award winning artist of *Seaguy, Batman And Robin, Catwoman* and many more, it picks up ten years after the >



Santa Durden is coming to town! Variant cover for *Fight Club 2* #8 by Steve Morris.


WAK
POK
CHOP
GOUGE
AND PREP MY JET!

Left and above: The series is filled with black humour and ironies, such as the sedated Sebastian working for a supplier of mercenaries.

original's finale. The unnamed narrator is now going by 'Sebastian' and is married to Marla Singer. The pair have a son, but domestic "bliss" is eating away at the pair of them. Sebastian, heavily medicated to keep his megalomaniac alter-ego Tyler Durden in check, has become a bore and so, depressed, Marla starts tampering with his meds so that she can have an "affair" with bad-boy Tyler. It's not long, however, before Durden takes control of Sebastian and abducts their son. What follows is a pitch-black comedy adventure that takes in ISIS, a group of young progeria sufferers and appearances by the author himself. It's as controversial – or "transgressive," as Palahniuk puts it – as you'd expect, but also hilarious and occasionally affecting.

Was it strange, we ask, reconnecting with those characters after two decades apart? Palahniuk responds with a chuckle. "No, not really, because people have never let me forget these characters. People have kept them fresh for me for 20 years. But that's a nice thing. Subsequent generations always seem to come across *Fight Club* and now it's worked its way into academia and schools, so I guess it's there to last."

RESIGNED TO CONFLICT

"Boy… You know, I just wrote it for the fun of it," Palahniuk says of the original novel, which turns 20 this year. "There's that horrible phrase, to do something 'for shits and giggles'. I did kind of do it as a joke on publishing… I was just amazed that once it got into the world it kind of built an audience.

"It was an act of resignation... I was raised in such a contentious world. It seemed like every country was at war. We were always told that civilisation would reach an equilibrium where we would reach this global peace. And so I grew up believing that, but in so many ways things are worse now than they were when I was as a child. *Fight Club* was me embracing conflict because I had given up on the idea that it would ever be resolved." So it was a way of making some kind of peace with that fact? "Exactly. I think Max Brooks talks a lot about zombies as a way of young people embracing and dealing with threats to their mortality in a metaphorical way."

Since the publication of *Fight Club*, Chuck has published 13 novels, two books of short fiction (though arguably *Haunted* counts as a novel too), one "remix" and two collections of non-fiction detailing his various adventures. So why return to his debut now, after all this time? Was it a case of reclaiming the book after years of it being seen primarily as a movie?

"That, and there was so little development in the characters [in the novel]. They really were just the actions they took, so I thought a comic could develop the characters in a way that neither a movie or a book could." He set about writing the ten-issue mini-series, but the first draft was >

> "I DID KIND OF WRITE FIGHT CLUB AS A JOKE ON PUBLISHING… I WAS AMAZED IT BUILT AN AUDIENCE"

CHUCK ON COMICS

What is your relationship with comics? Did you grow up reading them?
I grew up reading both the really low-brow EC horror comics, which I loved, and also *Classics Illustrated*. So I was reading the very low-brow stuff and then reading *Hamlet*. *Classics Illustrated* was probably my introduction to "high" literature, when I was really little. I loved their *Frankenstein*. But I didn't really read other comics until recently when a friend introduced me to Matt Fraction and Brian Michael Bendis and they offered to mentor me and teach me how to write for comics.

Have you spent a lot of time working with those guys on *Fight Club 2*?
A little bit, kind of on the first draft. They coached me through it. There was a chance that Matt was going to be the editor, at one point, but I went ahead with Dark Horse so I could work with Scott Allie.

Fig. 1
Fig. 2
Fig. 3
Fig. 4
Fig. 5
SMASH
SO HE DIDN'T DIE?

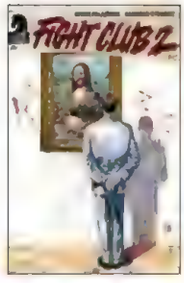
VITAMIN K
BUT TYLER
I ANSWER TO A HIGHER POWER THAN MR. DURDEN
MARRIAGE
CATHOLICS IN FIVE WIVES INSTEAD OF DIVORCE
"MARTYRDOM
"YOU KNOW WHAT A HOLLYWOOD SAVIOR IS?"
"SHE HAD TO GRIND"

"terrible for comics. It was like a novel, just broken down. The guy who had to do the lettering explained that the dialogue was so plentiful it would be impossible to include it all."

A full redraft followed. "I went through it and cleaned out about 90% of the dialogue and from there it was very easy. It was easy to identify the first beat of each gesture and the second beat and then make sure there was a setup at the end of the right-hand page and a payoff at the beginning of the left-hand page. I'm used to working with all the strictures and rules of minimalism, so this new set of rules wasn't that different."

It's paid off. Far from a cynical cash-in or lazy rehash, *Fight Club 2* is terrific. It feels of a piece with the original while working as a fine comic in its own right. Crucially, it's not just for fans, though Chuck has made sure there are plenty of nods for the die-hards, with cameos from numerous old faces and call-backs to events from the first book.

"Originally I was going to bring very, very little from the original book back," Chuck says. "I'd written the whole ten-issue series and then I went to Emerald City Comic-Con in Seattle, and I was on a big panel discussion. A lot of very young people started to ask if one secondary character or another was going to come back and I realised that people were really attached to these characters that I hadn't considered very important at all! So I did another rewrite and I brought back all the old characters."



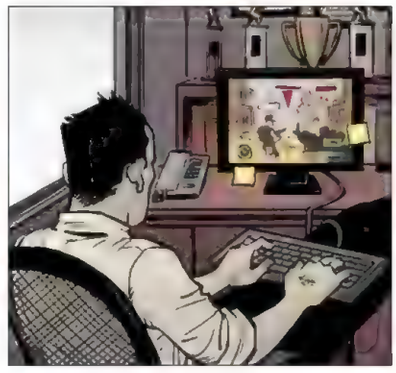
Left: Tyler displays often surreal unpredictability.

Above: The book plays with expectations, both in presentation and its freewheeling content.

Inset: Cover to #5 by the series' regular cover artist David Mack

One area that is new, however, is a stronger vein of the supernatural, though Chuck denies that this is a change in his work, pointing out that all his books "require the suspension of disbelief – believing that Tyler is in fact an alter ego, that he doesn't actually exist, was a huge ask".

Still, in *Fight Club 2*, Tyler is no longer just Sebastian's split personality but a malevolent force that has existed throughout all of human history. "I spent last summer in Spain reading all of Lovecraft and I liked the way he created this fictitious landscape with a culture and history all of its own. Stephen King did that as well with *Salem's Lot* and *Jerusalem's Lot*, superimposing a map of his idea of the State of Maine over the actual state. So I thought I could do that. But instead of creating a kind of place-based mythology, I wanted to create a cross-time based mythology, where Tyler would be something that existed for all of human history, always swooping in to destroy families, taking possession of the one remaining son and doing this generation-after-generation towards the point when mankind will have the wherewithal to destroy itself. He would also have absolutely no respect for fathers and Tyler would step in as the ultimate father for the entire world, or what's left of the world."



STRONG MATERIAL

Despite these fantastical aspects, *Fight Club 2* is addressing some potent real-world issues. The original novel was about men in crisis, but Palahniuk believes the sequel is about humanity as a whole. "It seems like the issues that I talked about in *Fight Club* have become the issues of not just young men, but of young women also. Young people are looking for a future that's not just an extension of what they've been given from the past. That was one reason for making Marla an equal character, so that she would be just as active in the quest."

Are we at the point where someone like Tyler could spring >

“THE BIG SHOCKING CLIFFHANGER ENDING IS EITHER GOING TO ENRAGE PEOPLE OR DELIGHT THEM”
MACK

Left: Variant cover of #9 by Steve Morris

Above: David Mack cover art for #2, and Morris variant cover for #10.

forth? "Oh, I think so entirely," Chuck responds ominously. "I think we are so primed for a fascist leader and that we will likely just throw ourselves at – probably his – feet." Writing this the day after Donald Trump called for Muslims to be banned from the United States, it's hard not to worry that we may be almost there...

Chuck Palahniuk, it should be noted, is *not* a fascist. Where *Fight Club* showed both the good and the bad sides of Tyler's Project Mayhem, here he is undeniably a tyrant, ordering executions and forging links with terrorist organisations with total abandon. Was Palahniuk ever worried about putting such strong material out with a mainstream publisher?

"It's been fantastic. Scott [Allie, the recently departed editor-in-chief at Dark Horse] is so hands-on and has been so willing to let me do things I didn't think I'd get away with. I thought either [artist] Cameron Stewart or Scott or somebody in the production chain would say 'these images are just too upsetting or too transgressive' but so far nobody's said that. Issue 7 contains some stuff that is really over the top. But what the hell, it's there and we loved putting it there and certain people are going to be very upset. But that's fine."

MESSING WITH MECHANICS

Dark Horse paired Palahniuk up with Cameron Stewart, a decision that Palahniuk is delighted by. The two got to know each other when Stewart spent some time in Portland, where they would meet up weekly to discuss ideas for the book. "We would talk about different ideas. Things like using more realistic objects to occlude parts of the page – like the rose petals, the pills, a bloody tooth – things that would kind of cover faces and pieces of dialogue and kind of negate them so people would either have to puzzle them out or be frustrated at not being able to read what was being said."

They also looked to the way that David Fincher's celebrated *Fight Club* movie played with the format of film. "We liked the idea of messing with the mechanics of comics, so that during the fight scenes in issue 4 the register goes off and the ink is printed incorrectly. And breaking that fourth wall by including the writer's workshop scenes. We included this kind of fake reality that would make the unreality of *Fight Club* seem *more* real.

"It really is a case of 'just surprise me'. I'm always thrilled when I see that [Stewart] has collapsed a couple of panels together and made something much better, things I wouldn't have had the smarts to do. And I've given him some fantastic challenges, things to really puzzle out, and he's met every challenge."

Chuck is keen to stress that this isn't a one-off, either. "Cameron is committed to another project in 2016, but as soon as he's free I'm going to have another ten or 12 issue series ready for another round of *Fight Club*." Would it be *Fight Club 3* or something different – a prequel, perhaps? "It will be a continuation from this one... Once you read the big shocking cliffhanger end of this one, you're going to instantly want to see the next part. We talked all summer about how to end this... It's just the biggest setup and payoff from the original book. Bigger than I ever could have imagined. And it's really so bold. It's another thing that's either going to enrage people or it's going to delight them." Chuck also reveals that, at the time of our interview, he's already written five issues of the next series.

But although *Fight Club* is taking a break in the latter half of 2016, that doesn't mean Chuck is. "I've already talked to people about doing a series of single-issue comics that will all be very... provocative. They'll each have a different artist – one completely appropriate for that topic – but all the single issues will circle around depicting the same theme, and will eventually be collected as a book." Provocative? Transgressive? That's unsurprising but very Chuck Palahniuk. And, boy, we can't wait... CH

CHUCK AT THE MOVIES

How are things looking on the film side of things?
Lullaby is optioned and being developed, and *Rant* was optioned last year by James Franco. *Invisible Monsters* has picked up steam again. And *Survivor* sold to a television production company and they've attached some big talent to it, but they won't tell me who! *Snuff* is due to go into production any day, but they've been saying that for months... Oh, and *Haunted*. *Haunted* has paid off, but we haven't seen a start day.

Would that be a portmanteau movie?
I have no idea, I haven't seen a screenplay. I haven't seen anything except a big fat cheque.

Has there been any interest in adapting *Fight Club 2* as a film?
Actually a television network contacted us. It seems like everybody is waiting to see how well received this first series is. 20th Century Fox owns part of the rights to producing any kind of a television series, so it would have to be something agreed upon between me and Fox.

MYTH MAKERS

WITH HIS NEW MILITARISED FOLKLORE TALE ABOUT TO LAUNCH, **SIMON SPURRIER** TALKS TO **STEPHEN JEWELL** ABOUT **CRY HAVOC**...

"I've been a massive geek about stories for as long as I've been a writer," Simon Spurrier admits. From his early *2000 AD* work like "Lobster Random" and "The Simping Detective" to his 2014 Avatar web comic *Disenchanted*, he has always been obsessed with the art of storytelling. Co-created with artist Ryan Kelly, his new Image series *Cry Havoc* is perhaps his most compelling shaggy dog story to date.

Described tongue-in-cheek as not being about "a lesbian werewolf who goes to war... except it kind of is," *Cry Havoc* resembles China Mieville's *Un Lun Dun* crossed with a supernaturally charged *Full Metal Jacket*.

"I like the idea that one way of looking at folklore is that it's a story that at one time was almost considered to be fact, an article of faith if you like," Spurrier says when we catch up with him at the 2015 Thought Bubble convention in Leeds. "I think that's fascinating, and I'm even more fascinated by the fact that [myths] have a shelf life. I wanted to tell a story literally from the point of view of one of these myths, and how that myth feels when it falls out of grace."

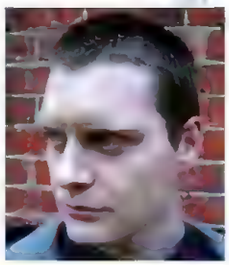
Illustrated by Ryan Kelly (*Saucer Country, Survivor's Club*), the first issue alone ranges from London Zoo to trendy Dalston and the battlefields of Afghanistan, as it examines what happens when people lose interest in tall tales.

"I wanted to do something about those sorts of monsters and folklore, and because I'm me, it ends up being really big and allegorical and about all that kind of stuff which I find fascinating," Spurrier laughs. "We now turn our noses up at the fact that there might be monsters prowling the darkness and fairies tangling your hair, which I regret because it's a better way of explaining how things work than the real explanation. We live in an increasingly anodyne world where all of these wonderful >

Main image: The alternative cover for the first issue of *Cry Havoc* is by Cameron Stewart.

This page: Unusually, there are three colorists on each issue, one for each thread of Lou's life: Lee Loughridge (the red pages), Nick Filardi (the blue pages, even lower left) and Matt Wilson (the yellow pages).

Right: Simon Spurrier is also currently working on *Doctor Who: The Eleventh Doctor* for Titan.



fictions that inform life despite being manifestly and demonstrably wrong are slightly sneered at."

WILD, WILD WOMEN

Spurrier acknowledges that the role religious belief plays in society can be viewed in the same light. "Today's religion can become tomorrow's folklore, tomorrow's myths and legends," he says, but adds "I don't want to get into this on *Cry Havoc*, although there's a bit of that in there." He continues: "All of these things will inevitably fade away and lose their vivacity. I'm interested in how it feels to be on the inside of that, and it's a nice allegory – and this was also true of *Disenchanted* – for anybody who has ever felt disenfranchised."

Having penned *X-Men: Legacy* for two years and various other Marvel mutant titles, Spurrier has found himself exploring familiar thematic territory. "I like to think that it's less on the nose than the X-Men, as it's easy to err between extremes," he reasons. "But it really applies to anybody of non-straight, non-white identity – anybody who has ever felt that they are living amongst people who think less of them than themselves. There's something nice about this whole paradigm of things being less important than they once were."

Centring on lycanthropic musician Louise Canton, *Cry Havoc* follows in a fine tradition of female-focused werewolf stories such as *The Hunger, Dog Soldiers* and *Ginger Snaps*, and in comics, most famously in *Swamp Thing* #40's "The Curse". Fittingly, the writer of that landmark story,

"THERE'S A SIMPLE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SEXUALITY AND THE SAVAGERY INSIDE"

Alan Moore himself, has praised the new series as "an electrifying account of black ops, black dogs and weaponised folklore that's unlike anything you've ever seen."

"There is that very easy association between – in the case of the *Swamp Thing* story in particular – lunar cycles and the female cycle. I'm not a woman, so it's always going to be borrowed wisdom when I say these things. But more than the obvious cyclical stuff, there is a simple, inexpressible association between sexuality in general, and the savagery and chaos that's inside."

With the explicit caveat that "it's completely ridiculous to generalise," Spurrier suggests that women are more in tune with their primal natures. "With men, it could be a cultural conditioning or not – and I can only speak for myself – but I was raised with the idea that a man should always be very in-control and in command of a situation, whereas women get to be flighty and creative. It's bullshit and I hate it! But it does make me excited about the possibility of admitting to oneself that allowing chaos into your life can be a wonderful and creative thing. Although quite how that relates to werewolves, I don't know."

Beginning with Lou visiting her zookeeper girlfriend at the hyena enclosure, the first issue's opening scenes provide a biology lesson that would do David Attenborough proud. "The whole morphology of the African striped hyena is particularly fascinating," explains Spurrier. "They can extrude their genitals, which then appear to be penises, so for centuries the hyena was regarded as this duplicitous, hermaphroditic creature that cannot be trusted because you never know what it is. But what it means is that they are functionally unrapeable. As a result, hyenas are the only pack animals where the female is unequivocally in charge. You have alpha females, not alpha males, and that works very well with all the dog mythology."

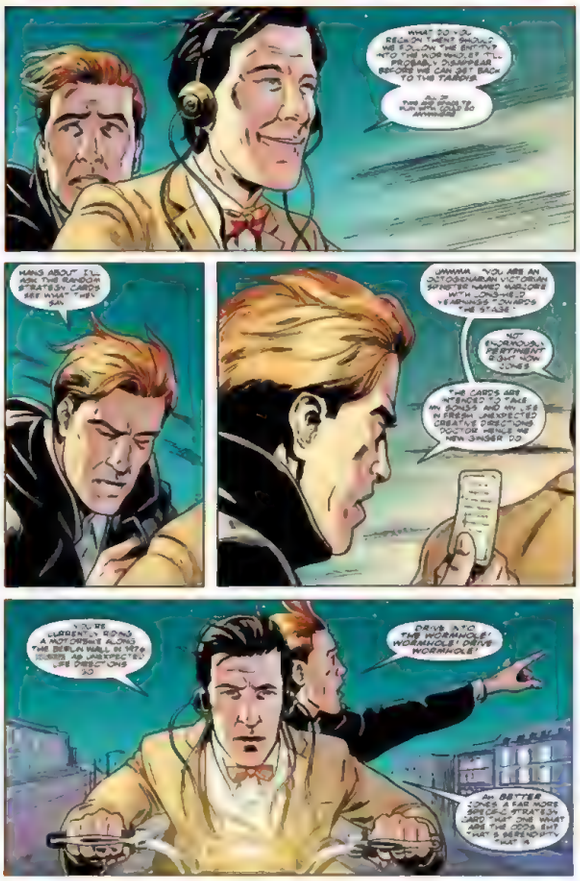
Above: *Cry Havoc* "mixes the hard-boiled militaria of *Jarhead* with the dark folklore of *Pan's Labyrinth*."

Below: Issue 1 cover by series artist Ryan Kelly and book designer Emma Price.

THE HORROR, THE HORROR

Struggling to discover her own identity, Lou fetches up in the war-torn wilds of Afghanistan, where she joins up with a band of crack mercenaries. In shades of Joseph Conrad's seminal novel *Heart of Darkness* and its subsequent cinematic incarnation *Apocalypse Now*, the group are dispatched into the unknown to track rogue army commander Lynn Odell, who has definitely gone dangerously native. "There's a lot of that in there," says Spurrier. "The original idea was to tell a story about a folkloric revolution or rebellion, where what if all the forgotten myths in the world got together and said 'You know what? We're determined to be relevant, so we're going to make a noise about it!'"

Spurrier was speaking to us two days after the terrorist atrocities in Paris, and observes that such subject matter is sadly very timely and applicable to the current world situation. "I'm interested in the distinction between revolution and terrorism," he adds. "All that >

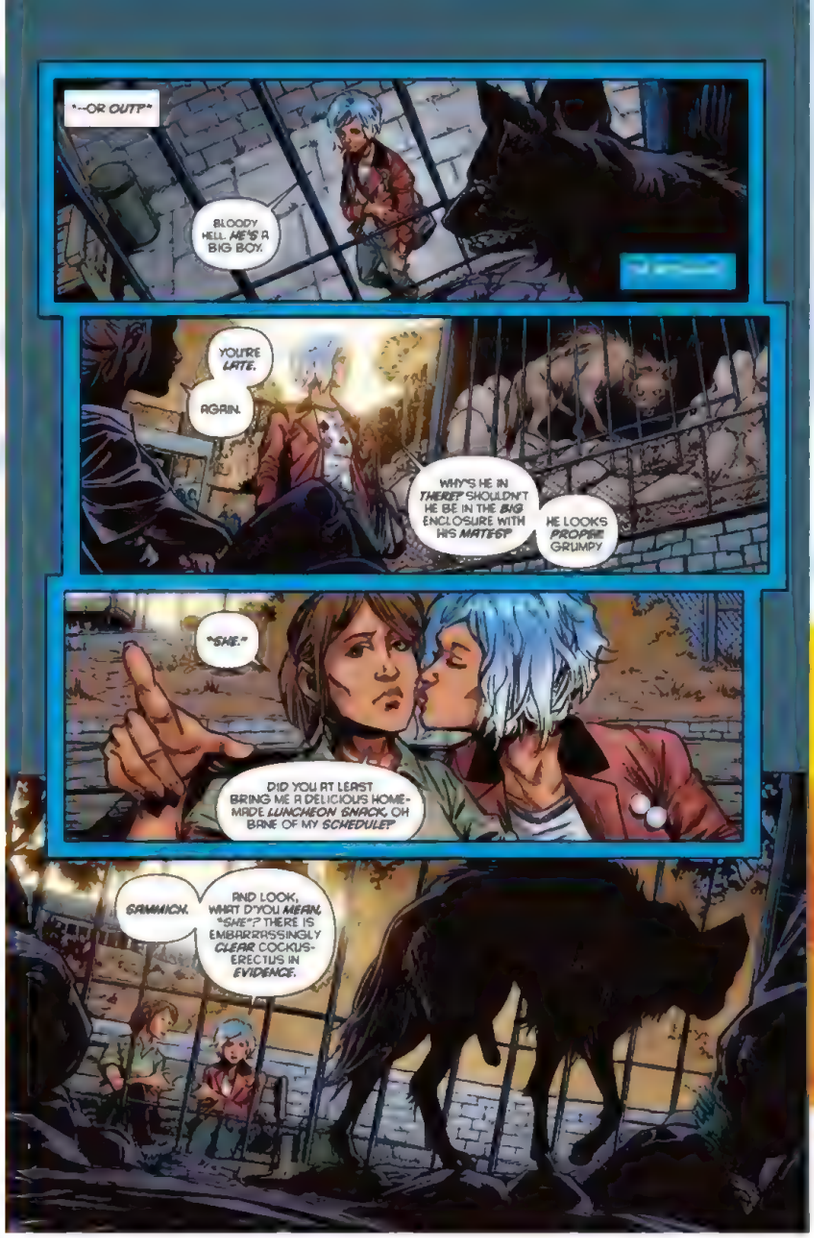


DOCTOR WHO

How did you come to co-write The 11th Doctor?
When Titan launched its first series of *Doctor Who* comics in 2014, I was supposed to co-write with Rob Williams and Al Ewing because we'd all just done the "Trifecta" series for *2000 AD*. It never worked out for me, but when the second season rolled around, Al was too busy with his Marvel commitments and I had a gap in my schedule, so Rob and I decided to co-write it.

So why bring back Absolom Daak?
We just wanted to! We wanted to do things differently, because we didn't have the benefit of it being the first season, so we decided to make it one long story rather than a series of short, episodic done-in-ones. The whole 15-issue run is essentially a chase sequence – it's the Doctor running away from things that won't stop chasing him and can find him wherever and whenever he goes. And because I've always been suspicious of the tweeness of some of the least successful *Doctor Who* stories, we wanted to inject some element of insane chaos into it. You don't have to look very far into *Doctor Who* comics of old, and there's Absolom Daak waiting for you. He's just the perfect foil!

Daak was created in 1980 by Steve Dillon and the late Steve Moore. Was acknowledging their legacy important to you?
It meant a lot to us that they were happy for us to use the character. It turns out that Alan Moore is Steve Moore's literary executor, so we went to Alan and said "Do you think Steve would be okay with us reviving this character?" Alan, who has always been lovely to me and likes my work, said "Yeah, do it as long as it's good." We chatted to Steve Dillon in New York, and he's very interested in coming back and doing some art for us, which would be amazing.


"--OR OUT?"
BLOODY HELL. HE'S A BIG BOY.
YOU'RE LATE.
AGAIN.
WHY'S HE IN THERE? SHOULDN'T HE BE IN THE BIG ENCLOSURE WITH HIS MATE?
HE LOOKS PROPER GRUMPY
"SHE."
DID YOU AT LEAST BRING ME A DELICIOUS HOME-MADE LUNCHEON SNACK, OH BANE OF MY SCHEDULE?
GAMMICK.
AND LOOK, WHAT D'YOU MEAN, "SHE"? THERE IS EMBARRASSINGLY CLEAR COCKUS-ERECTUS IN EVIDENCE.

stuff is a very human way into this much broader, epic story, which is all about this character who finds herself unravelling a mystery about what's really going on."

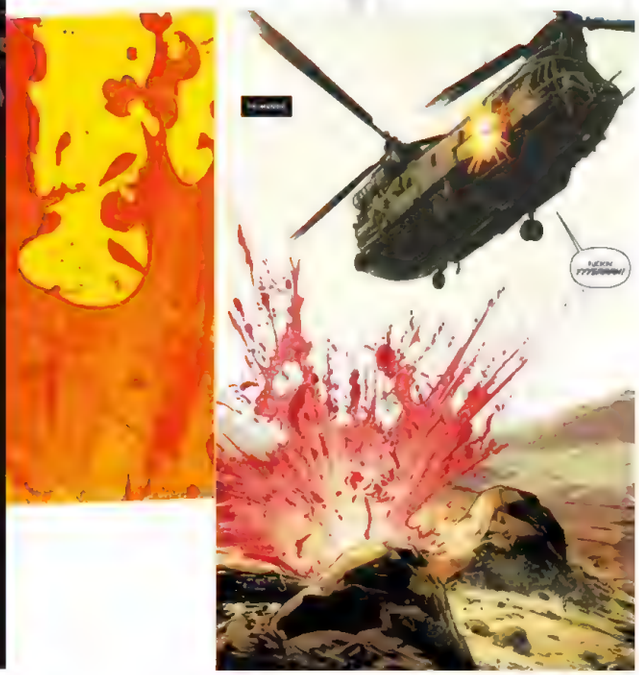
HAVOC AND PLUNDER

While the plot alludes to Conrad, the title is pure Shakespeare – in *Julius Caesar*, the assassinated Roman Emperor's right-hand man Marcus Antonius declares, "Cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war!" Spurrier points out that "historically, the word 'havoc' didn't mean what it does today." In Shakespeare, it implies not so much mere chaos as plundering and looting. "In the context, it meant going somewhere and stealing shit, which is quite cogent to the story, as we will eventually see."

Cry Havoc also shares several themes with *The Spire*, Spurrier's current series at Boom Studios, not least how both series feature central protagonists who are in same-sex relationships. "That's a complete coincidence," he says. "I started developing them a long time apart. *The Spire* was originally a screenplay that I wrote at university for my film, and it's just happened that the two things have now bubbled up side by side. The two stories are different enough that it's not just, 'Hey, Simon is going through his lesbian phase,' and there are things that I cannot mention about both those stories that separate them in different directions as well. But, hey, if I end up being known as the guy who did a bunch of lesbian stories, there are

"IF I END UP BEING KNOWN FOR LESBIAN STORIES, THERE ARE WORSE THINGS..."

PSEUDOPRICK. MY SWEET, TUBULAR LADYPARTS. EASILY LICKABLE FOR SOCIAL BONDING.
WOT
MATRIARCHAL HIERARCHY, INNIT? THAT ONE BIT OF KIT MAKES A SHE-HYENA FUNCTIONALLY UNRAPEABLE.
CHANGES THE WHOLE POWER DYNAMIC.
JESUS.
...BUT...SO... WAIT... WHY'D YOU SOUND SO DISGUSTED?
I MEAN... MEGACLITTED GIRLPOWER SISTERHOOD. ? WHY AREN'T YOU QUEEN OF THE HYENA FANCLUB?
HONESTLY?
I SORT OF HATE THEM.
OHHH, I KNOW IT'S STUPID, UNWORTHY THOUGHT FOR A BLOODY ZOOKEEPER. NOT FAIR TO JUDGE THEM ON HUMAN TERMS.
POOR THINGS ALREADY BEEN TYPECAST AS THE CHUCKLING EVIL FUCKHEADS OF THE NATURAL WORLD--THAT'S NOT FAIR EITHER.
IT'S JUST. THERE'S SOMETHING CHAOTIC ABOUT THEM.
PERVERSELY UNPREDICTABLE, Y'KNOW? MEH MOST OF ALL.
SO WHY IS SHE ON HER OWN?
Huh. SHE ATE HER SISTER.



worse things to be known for!"

The Spire is the follow-up to 2014's acclaimed *Six Gun Gorilla*, which also saw him team up with artist Jeff Stokely, and Spurrier pitched it as "*Blade Runner* meets *Dark Crystal* by way of *Mad Max*." Apart from its main characters' sexual preferences, its gritty urban fantasy scenario actually has little else in common with *Cry Havoc's* more visceral horror. In *The Spire* "I wanted to create an incredible world, where everybody feels that they could lose themselves in it," says Spurrier. "I could answer any question you have about how the world works, but we're not going to put [all these details] in the comic because the story itself is a small-ish, intimate story. There's a real tendency in genre fiction where if you've created this detailed world, the stakes of the story then have to be world-shattering, but they really don't. If you're telling a story in a made-up world, it needs to be about the characters, so that people have something they can relate to and recognise. So it ends up being a human story. And Jeff draws really great acting and characters in a very stylish, lavish way, so I just wanted to go crazy and throw ideas at him."

Spurrier describes Stokely as "somebody who is like an extension of my imagination," making his collaboration with Stokely sound more symbiotic than his more measured partnership with Kelly on *Cry Havoc*. "With *The Spire*, it's the first time I've found myself deliberately leaving gaps in the script because I know Jeff will just do something and it will be awesome," he says. "Whereas, with Ryan, I write very detailed scripts with images of hyena penises and so forth, and he'll just draw it and improve it. He will do everything exactly the way I tell him to, because he's that good, and the narrative will always be perfectly constructed.

"Ryan has been in the industry for a long time and is not known as one of those stylised, guys who are no good at storytelling, which is the art you need to be good at in comics. Ryan is a guy who is good at drawing whatever he puts his mind to. And gives good monster and great military, which I didn't expect!"

Left and opposite: The opening sequence set in London Zoo, coloured by Nick Filardi.

Right: A sample page set in Afghanistan, with colours by Matt Wilson.

Below: Spurrier showed his skill with horror on the post-apocalyptic *Crossed*, originated by Garth Ennis

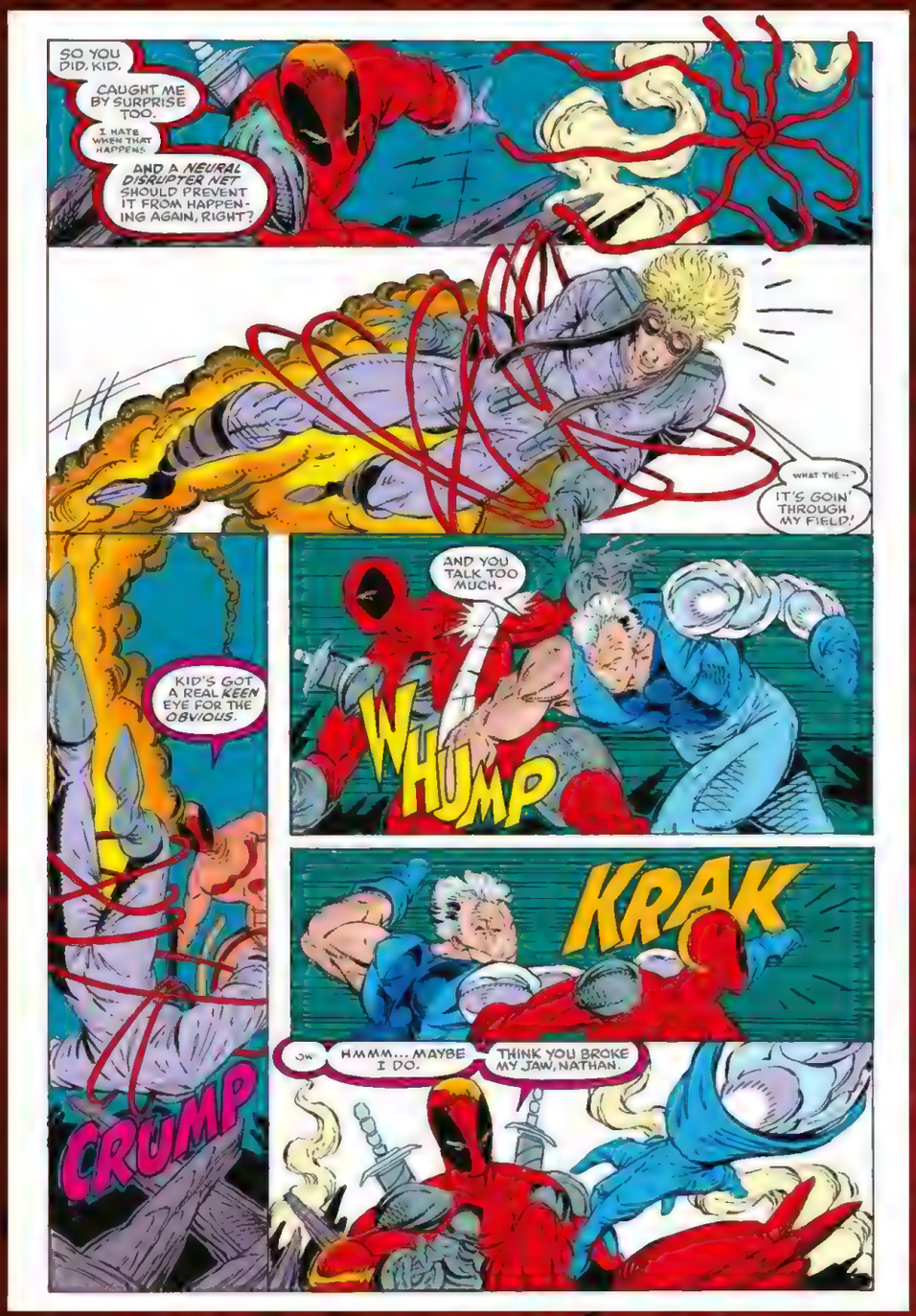
BACK IN THE RED

WITH A MUCH-HYPED MOVIE ON THE HORIZON AND A NEW ORIGINAL GRAPHIC NOVEL COMING OUT FROM MARVEL, DEADPOOL CREATOR **ROB LIEFELD** IS RETURNING TO HIS ROOTS, AS **STEPHEN JEWELL** FINDS OUT

"I'm 48 years old and I'm all about legacy." As both the co-creator of classic Marvel characters like Deadpool and Cable and also one of the co-founders of Image Comics, Rob Liefeld's reputation definitely precedes him. Exactly 25 years since Deadpool's debut in *New Mutants* #98, The Merc With A Mouth is poised to star in what should be the most offbeat and surreal superhero movie to date, and the California-born writer/artist couldn't be more excited about Ryan Reynolds returning in the role of the Crimson Nutcase after his promising turn in 2010's *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*.

Although Liefeld is busy with his own creator-owned Image titles like *The Covenant* and *Bloodstrike*, he will return to Marvel this year with a new graphic novel, *Deadpool: Bad Blood*, which he is drawing and co-writing with *X-Men '92*'s Chad Bowers and Chris Sims.

"I'll tell you now, if I could go back and give 21/22-year-old Rob Liefeld a hug and a high-five, I'd say 'you did right by your family,'" says Liefeld. "Moves that I made as a young man and ambitions that I had, stuff that I sacrificed to do this,


SO YOU DID, KID.
CAUGHT ME BY SURPRISE TOO.
I HATE WHEN THAT HAPPENS.
AND A NEURAL DISRUPTER NET SHOULD PREVENT IT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN, RIGHT?
WHAT THE--?
IT'S GOIN' THROUGH MY FIELD!
AND YOU TALK TOO MUCH.
WHUMP
KID'S GOT A REAL KEEN EYE FOR THE OBVIOUS.
KRAK
CRUMP
OW.
HMMM... MAYBE I DO.
THINK YOU BROKE MY JAW, NATHAN.

Left: Liefeld is renowned for his action-packed, art-driven storytelling.

Above: The classic *New Mutants* #98 introduced Deadpool and Domino.

have paid off in a huge way, whether it was characters I came up with for Marvel that have had great longevity or the establishing of Image Comics. I had friends who said 'Why are you giving those characters to Marvel?' and they were the same friends who then said 'Why are you starting your own label?'"

Liefeld broke into the industry straight out of high school. His first significant assignment was pencilling a five-part *Hawk and Dove* miniseries for DC in 1988 when he was just 18. But it was when he moved to Marvel and became the regular penciller on *New Mutants* with #86 in 1989 that he really began to make a name for himself. Credited with turning the ailing monthly's fortunes around, he also assuming co-writing duties in #98 with co-scripter Fabian Nicieza.

Liefeld had already co-created Cable with Louise Simonson in *New Mutants* #87. In #98 and #99, he and Nicieza not only introduced Deadpool but also fan-favourite characters like Shatterstar and Domino. When *New Mutants* concluded with #100, the pair next teamed up on the more high-octane *X-Force*, the first issue of which sold a massive five million copies in August 1991, briefly making it the best selling comic of all time, at least until Jim Lee's *X-Men #1* sold an even more astounding eight million copies a few months later.

"The great thing was that I had no inhibitions when I was in my early 20s, and I didn't have a family to maybe give me pause in regard to 'what if this happens or that doesn't work out and your family suffers

Left: The forthcoming Deadpool graphic novel: plot, pencils and inks by Liefeld, script by Chad Bowers and Chris Sims.

"THE GREAT THING WAS THAT I HAD NO INHIBITIONS WHEN I WAS IN MY EARLY 20S"

because of that?'" says Liefeld. "I understand that point of view and I knew guys who had legitimate concerns along the way. But I was a single 20-something kid with just raw ambition, energy and discipline. All those *New Mutants* and *X-Force* books came out monthly, like 'Boom! Boom! Boom!' I did almost three years on those characters, and that built the foundations of my career."

With Liefeld supplying his look and alias and Nicieza his distinctive speech patterns, Deadpool proved an instant hit. *X-Force* #2, with a battling Merc With A Mouth on its cover, sold a still not-too-shabby 1.2 million copies. "We'd been gaining steam and running up the sales charts," says Liefeld. "The reason why Deadpool was in every issue of *X-Force* was because editorial said 'We've never gotten mail about a character like we've gotten for Deadpool.' He has always been ridiculously popular."

Liefeld attributes Deadpool's enormous appeal to his distinctive threads, inspired by the artist's long-time love of Spider-Man. "It's a great visual, and you can never underscore the power of a great visual!" he says, pointing out how little Deadpool's appearance has altered over the past two and a half decades in contrast to other leading costumed crusaders. "In that time, Captain America has had about ten separate looks, while Spider-Man has probably had 20 different uniforms and variations of his costume, whether it's *Spider-Man 2099*, *Ultimate Spider-Man* or the

revisions of Spider-Man in *Civil War*," he asserts. "Some of these iconic Marvel characters are always changing up, but Deadpool is still the same character, and he always looks the same, as he's got a great iconic image. No matter what version of him you're getting, it's still the same version I laid down when I first put pen to paper and brought him to life, and that's incredibly satisfying."

JUST ANOTHER WISE GUY

Also inspired by Spidey, Deadpool's subversive sense of humour has always been key to his character. "That's what people forget, but kids get it, as that was my entire basis for him," says Liefeld. "They say 'Did you just base him on Spider-Man visually?' But what they forget is that in the Spider-Man cartoons that I grew up on, he was always the wise guy, and back then he was the only character that did that, as Superman, Batman and Iron Man didn't do that."

Apart from Spidey, Liefeld believes Deadpool is closest in spirit to an even more rambunctious mutant with whom he shares a rapid healing ability and a penchant for violence.

> "WITH BOTH DEADPOOL AND CABLE, I WAS TRYING TO CREATE THE NEW WOLVERINE"

"With both Deadpool and Cable," he says, "I was trying to create the new Wolverine. No matter what has happened to him or what creative team has been working on him, Wolverine always looks great. Comics are a visual medium, and he's got another really great, powerful visual."

Revealing that "Deadpool is mired by design in the Weapon X program," Liefeld says that the character is what happens when the clandestine government genetic research project's nefarious efforts don't go according to plan. "When we established who came before Wolverine, Deadpool was the one where they almost got it right, and then they got it right with Wolverine," says Liefeld. "That was the pitch, and that's what Marvel bought, and then we added the crazy humour on top of that."

Liefeld has long had a fondness for catchy codenames, having scribbled down many suitable aliases in his notebook since he was a teenager. "I've always had a long list of names and I still do, which I then use to match up a visual when I'm creating a story for the visual," he explains.

Referring to his creator-owned team book, which launched the Image Comics line in 1992, he continues: "I had a character in *Youngblood* called Diehard, but I didn't name him after the movie. Here in America, we have a battery called the 'DieHard battery,' because it never dies. He was a sort of automated person, so I just figured 'Diehard.' We drove a Ford Cougar when I was a teenager, and I thought 'There's no character called 'Cougar,' so I adopted that for another character in *Youngblood*."

I MUST ADMIT, I DON'T THINK MUCH OF THESE CHAMPIONS SO FAR
I'M GOING TO GO BREAK WHATEVER BONES THEY HAVE LEFT. BACK IN A SECOND.
I DON'T REALLY APPRECIATE WHEN SOME DORK BUSTS UP MY ACTION, ESPECIALLY WHEN I WAS RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF SCAMMING SOME HOT ALIEN TAIL.
SO I'M GOING TO HAVE ONE MORE PURPLE BEER, THEN MY DOG AND I ARE GONNA KICK. YOUR. ASS.
YOU DON'T REALLY BELIEVE THAT CRAP, DO YOU?
Shhhh. It's a cliffhanger.
GRRRRR
TO BE CONTINUED...

Far left: A hit from the start, Deadpool took over the cover of *X-Force* #2.

Left: The character has been depicted by many writers and artists, and has fluctuated from very dark to quite comical.

Liefeld also cites the example of the erstwhile Nathan Summers, whom he and Louise Simonson transformed into a time-travelling cybernetic assassin in 1990. "I always thought that Cable was a great name," he says. "But I actually had to fight to call him that when I submitted the character to Marvel – editorial wanted to call him 'Commander X.' I said 'If you call him that, I'm out, and I'm pulling Cable,' as names are very important."

As for Deadpool's own memorable moniker, Liefeld derived that from 1988's final *Dirty Harry* instalment, *The Dead Pool*. "I had come out of that movie thinking 'how is that not an awesome name?'" recalls Liefeld. "So I just wrote it down, as it seemed like a fantastic name, especially for a guy who is going to be a mercenary."

Concerned about royalties and ownership rights, Liefeld dramatically left Marvel after *X-Force* #12 in 1992. Taking up his own creator-owned properties, he set up Image Comics with other similarly disaffected high-profile creators including Todd McFarlane, Marc Silvestri and Jim Lee. Consequently, Nicieza teamed up with Joe Madureira on 1993's inaugural Deadpool mini-series *The Circle Chase*. In 1994 Mark Waid and Ian Churchill produced a second four-parter. Joe Kelly and Ed McGuinness eventually helmed Deadpool's first ongoing monthly in 1997.

INFINITE INTERPRETATIONS

Kelly and his successors – including Christopher Priest, Gail Simone, Daniel Way and currently Gerry Duggan and Cullen Bunn – have collectively taken the book from low sales to a whole new level of fan appreciation. Kelly is widely credited with introducing the narrative conceit of "breaking the fourth wall", where Deadpool would directly address the reader. "Can you say that is what has made Deadpool popular?" asks Liefeld. "You cannot pin Deadpool down. But I will tell you that if you take that costume away, you have a big problem."

Returning to Marvel occasionally over the years to produce series like 1996 crossover *Heroes Reborn* and 2006's *Onslaught Reborn*, Liefeld has kept an eye on the adventures of his creation and has been impressed by the apparently infinite interpretations there have been of his essentially malleable character. "Did I envisage him in *Classics Killustrated*, hunting Moby Dick and shooting arrows with William Tell? No!" he laughs, referring to the 2013 mini-series written by Cullen Bunn, where

COULD BE BETTER, COULD BE WORSE.
WE WERE DOING OKAY AGAINST DEADPOOL!
YEAH, SURE--AND YOU DIDN'T NEED ANY HELP, DID YOU?
LET'S NOT SPEND TOO MUCH TIME TRYING TO TAKE THE CREDIT FOR THIS FUNK'S CAPTURE.
WHAT DO WE DO WITH YOU NOW, DEADPOOL?
Y'KNOW, I'VE ALWAYS WANTED THE CHANCE TO REHABILITATE MYSELF--YOU KNOW, SOMEWHERE NICE...
...HOW ABOUT A PRISON IN THE BAHAMAS?
HOW ABOUT WE SEND YOU BACK TO TOLLIVER AND LET HIM DEAL WITH YOU?
FROM WHAT I REMEMBER ABOUT TOLLIVER, HE DOESN'T TAKE KINDLY TO FAILURES, DOES HE?
YOU SEE HOW THIS DOMINO LADY AFFECTS CABLE?
HE'S ACTUALLY SMILING!
S'KINDA CUTE--ROMANTIC--LIKE BONNIE & CLYDE...
I REMEMBER TOO NOW...

Left: Rob Liefeld has contributed a number of fan-favourite characters to the Marvel Universe.

Deadpool is immersed in the worlds of novels like *A Christmas Carol* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and interacts with classic characters like Sherlock Holmes and the Headless Horseman. "There have been some great liberties taken with him, but it's like there's a Deadpool for everybody. It's cool that there have been so many different versions of him, and will continue to be! If I showed you a picture of my shelf, I have all these killer Deadpool statues, and they all emphasise the action of the character. He's got a giant gun in one hand and a sword in the other, or two guns. He looks like the ultimate bad-ass!"

Liefeld himself took Wade Wilson in a different direction in 2010 12-parter *Deadpool Corps*. "I put him in space in a spaceship, and he teamed up with four different versions of himself," he says. "If you ask me with a gun to my head, I'd say that I love Kid Deadpool. He's awesome and he has lightsabers! Deadpool has been worked out on a massive canvas."

Deadpool Corps also saw the arrival of Lady Deadpool, who has been eagerly embraced by female fans. "I see Lady Deadpools everywhere!" says Liefeld, who has been pleased to see cosplayers dressed up as Deadpool's numerous incarnations at the many conventions that he attends every year. "Over the last five years, Deadpool has been the most cosplayed character at cons, and I always say that the fans own Deadpool with all the different ways that they dress up in their Deadpool cosplay. There's also all the fan art that I see on Instagram and other social media. The fans have taken control of Deadpool, and have made him their own. He's like this genius kind of icon and he's also the first of the big '90s characters from that time, when comics were selling in their millions, to get their own movie. It's just the perfect storm."

MERC MERCHANDISE

While the comics have consistently sold strongly over the past ten years, Liefeld believes it is the proliferation of Deadpool merchandise in other mediums that has made him such a universal favourite. "His newfound popularity comes from video games like *Marvel vs. Capcom*, where he was the most popular playable Marvel character," says Liefeld. "I have two boys and they were seven and nine respectively when *Marvel vs. Capcom* came out. Them and the other boys in the neighbourhood – sometimes up to

Left: Costume inspired by Spider-Man, with added armaments.

Below: Domino too has proved a fan-favourite.

"OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS, DEADPOOL HAS BEEN THE MOST COSPLAYED CHARACTER AT CONS"

eight or nine kids – would be sitting in front of our big-screen TV, and often it would be Deadpool vs. Deadpool. Other times, parents would cross over the soccer field to say to me 'My son says you created some character that he plays all the time?' and I'm like 'How do you know that, as it's not something we advertise?'"

Other licensed products such as the Lego Marvel Superhero range have also been crucial in the character's ongoing success. "Deadpool is the hardest character to win in that, as you have to unlock all these levels to achieve him," continues Liefeld. "I've had friends who are heads of Hollywood studios ask 'Dude, do you have a secret code to unlock this?' and I'm like 'I've got nothing for you!'

Then the licensors chose to make a pop-up Deadpool t-shirt, and in all the retail outlets they were selling out. You know how it works! They make two more, or six, or eight more of the item... Deadpool is a really strong visual character. He's all over my shelf. I make a point of having every possible Deadpool everything, from statues to magnets. Whenever you walk into one of the big pop culture stores in the States over the last two years, Deadpool has always been front and centre, and that's without the benefit of the movie."

Having worked closely with director Tim Miller and screenwriters Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick, Liefeld has high hopes for the upcoming blockbuster. "Clearly, there's been some really talented comedic writers who have written some ridiculously funny bits for Deadpool over the years, but the funniest stuff anyone has ever written for Deadpool is in the movie," he says. "I can't give the writers enough praise! When I first read the script in 2010, I was falling off my couch, partly because of the humour but also partly in horror at

some of the black comedy. It was like 'if this makes it into the film, this is a moment people will talk about for weeks!' because they haven't held anything back."

TO THE EDGE

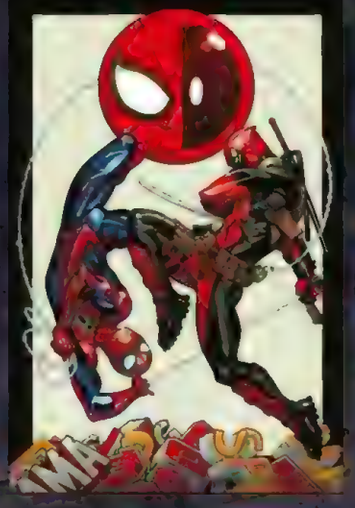
According to Liefeld, the film's edgy, close-to-the-bone approach is all-important. "When I was young, the movies that me and my buddies went and saw were all R-rated, whether it was *Robocop*, *Terminator*, *Alien* and *Aliens*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Predator* and *Die Hard*," he recalls. "There was a PG-13 but the cool, cutting-edge stuff was all R-rated. Now we've gone into these very safe, family films. But if you step outside of that, as *Deadpool* is going to do, you're going to reap the benefits because people are sick of things being so samey."

The only question Liefeld declines to consider is what he would like to see in a possible *Deadpool* sequel. "You know what? I can't answer that. I think they're going to come up with something great, and I'm very interested in experiencing it!"

MAN VERSUS MERC

Nearly two decades after he helmed Deadpool's first monthly, **Joe Kelly** is returning to the character alongside Ed McGuinness. He tells **Stephen Jewell** why the time was right for *Spider-Man/Deadpool*...

Comic Heroes: Deadpool was a little-known character when you were first on the book. Is there more pressure now?
Joe Kelly: I've always written the same way, especially with mainstream books, and I just want to do the best job that I can. I just try to tell a fun story that I would want to read as a reader. The book comes with a lot of expectations because it's Spidey and Deadpool, who are two of the biggest characters in the Marvel Universe. It's a cool way for me to come back into a mainstream book after sporadically doing indie books in between doing film and animation for so long



Left: Deadpool *loves* Spider-Man. Spider-Man *hates* Deadpool. What could go wrong?

Below: Kelly promises it won't all be comedy.

"IT'S A COOL WAY FOR ME TO COME BACK INTO A MAINSTREAM BOOK"

CH: *Deadpool* was your first ongoing book...
JK: I'd just started writing for Marvel and was still going to graduate school at NYU when I met Matt Idelson, who was an assistant editor at the time. He offered me the chance to pitch for Deadpool and I put in this really crazy submission. It was the time of *Heroes Reborn* and so in the pitch, Deadpool was running around the *Heroes Reborn* universe. He'd stolen the ball from Franklin Richards just to be a jerk, so he had the whole fate of the Marvel Universe in his hands, and he was going up against Ego the Living Planet and Obnoxio the Clown. It was the weirdest stuff ever but something in it struck a chord with Matt, so he gave me the opportunity to write the series.

CH: Did you think back then that Deadpool would become so popular that he'd get his own Hollywood blockbuster?
JK: No! Especially not in the beginning. We literally were told "this won't last past six issues". That was great because we were able to do whatever we wanted as nobody was paying attention. But we slowly built up this fanbase of "Deadheads" – which I co-opted from The Grateful Dead – so Marvel gradually started to notice that the book was doing okay and readers actually liked Deadpool.

CH: You declined to return to Deadpool several times. Why did you change your mind?
JK: When (X-Men editor) Nick Lowe put it to me, he said "I've got an offer you can't refuse! Spider-Man! Deadpool! McGuinness!" That was very exciting because I love Spider-Man. As a fan, Spider-Man is my absolute number one hero. So to put Spidey and Deadpool together, and to come in after the events of the summer [in *Secret Wars*] felt really fresh and a lot of fun. So there's a little bit of a nostalgia factor, but it also feels like kinda new.

CH: And you get to work with Ed McGuinness again!
JK: One of the things about what Ed does is that his art is so open, it balances out my natural evil instincts. We did some really dark stuff in our original run but people barely noticed because of what he did. There's a direct correlation between how dark you want Deadpool to be and the style of the artist. Ed is a very good match for that because you can throw really twisted characterisations at him and they still look kind of cute, even with his current style, which has got a little bit more detail and shade to it. His take on the characters enhances the comedy when I want it to be funny and balances out the creepiness when we want to go dark. It's a great juxtaposition.

CH: Spidey and Deadpool are both instinctive comedians, so do they have to take turns being the straight man?
JK: It goes deeper than that. It might sound trite but after 50 years "with great power comes great responsibility" is still the thing with Spidey, especially after the events of *Superior Spider-Man*. He's more of a grown-up than Deadpool, who is still like his polar opposite – his tagline is 'with great power comes great irresponsibility.' So those two clash and have to solve problems together, and Spidey tries not to cross a line while Deadpool also tries not to cross lines but just can't help himself.

CH: Does the book also reflect the different political and social climate?
JK: This is a challenging time to write mainstream superhero books, which is something we also went through after 9/11. A lot of stuff has become taboo. There are elements we could bring up in a superhero context but it would just seem like we were minimising them. These characters are great foils for one another and we can use them to explore social issues. I'm trying to weasel that in where I can because you know that they're going to fight people and you're going to see cool powers and some really big, awesome fight sequences drawn by Ed. But we can also go deep and have frank conversations between these two guys about things like Ms. Marvel and "what does that mean?" The aspiration is to emulate the *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* series from the '70s – that was also about two heroes with different points of view, although those guys were a bit more lefty and righty and far apart politically. This is a bit more "socially conscious/social idiot" and what happens when they come together.

***Spider-Man/Deadpool 1* is out now**

LAIKA

NICK ABADZIS' 2007 GRAPHIC NOVEL TELLS THE STORY OF THE FIRST DOG IN SPACE. HE TALKS TO GRAHAM KIBBLE-WHITE ABOUT ITS ORIGINS

In 2002, at the World Space Congress in Houston, Texas, one of the founding myths of the Space Race was finally exposed. Dr Dimitri Malashenkov, who had been part of the team working on Sputnik 2 in November 1957, revealed that, contrary to the official statements issued by the Soviet Union, the dog on board the satellite had not survived in orbit for a week. In truth, she had died about five hours after take-off, in a highly panicked state, falling victim to a combination of stress and a cabin temperature exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

Having achieved a remarkable propaganda coup with the launch of Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite, Soviet premier Khrushchev had ordered the follow-up mission to take place within weeks, to capitalise on this success and to tie in with the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution. But the mission needed an added element, a new achievement to press home Soviet supremacy. And that was a stray mongrel named Laika.

Her story is the subject of Nick Abadzis' beautiful, elegiac graphic novel published by First Second Books in 2007. "The genesis of the book was when I read about Laika when I was a child," Abadzis told us. "The idea that a dog was Earth's first space traveller was cool, but I couldn't get over the thought that she'd been sent on a one-way trip. It really terrified me and stayed with me."

It was the 2002 revelation about Laika's death that ultimately prompted Abadzis to start work on the story. "I'd always been a real space and history nut, and had wanted to do something about the Soviets. I thought it'd make a great subject for a short strip but, as I read and researched, the project snowballed and I became obsessed with filling in the blanks, making it authentic rather than some Disneyfied cutesy dead dog story."

ORDINARY LIVES, HISTORIC MOMENTS

"Laika also seemed to be a way to tell a story about a pivotal time in history – the beginning of the Space Age and the Age of Information that we live in now. It was a moment when there was a huge change in the way human civilisation viewed itself, and this little representative of caninekind, so often said to be our best friends, somehow got caught up in it. Around her were the lives and loves of ordinary Russians, kindnesses and hurt, all orbiting this incredible event, and I wanted to show it all in the book."

Over a period of four years, Abadzis undertook extensive research, reading old newspapers and >

books, talking to historians and scientists. "At the British Library, a very helpful librarian translated some Russian texts for me. And I unearthed some taped interviews with Oleg Gazenko [the scientist who selected and trained Laika] in the Smithsonian's Archive, which were enormously helpful from a visual angle, as I got to see the kinds of environments in which he worked, as well as getting a sense of the man.

"I also went to Moscow, where I was hoping to gain access to several institutions and conduct interviews, but none of them replied to me until about two years after I wrote to them – things moved glacially slowly compared to the rate I was creating the book. But I did get to visit the Museum of Cosmonautics, where a fantastically helpful lady got me an invitation to look around Korolev's house, which is preserved as a private museum. I wasn't allowed to take pictures, but I got to stand in his study and spaces he worked and thought in, which was a thrill and enormously helpful in helping to comprehend his character."

Sergei Pavlovich Korolev is one of the real people depicted in the book. The charismatic director of the Sputnik programme, he had been sentenced in the 1930s to ten years in a Gulag work camp for alleged crimes against the state.

This page: Some characters are historic, some imagined. They never ignore the morality of what they're doing, but put it to one side under the inexorable pressure of what they are trying to achieve.

> "I BECAME OBSESSED WITH FILLING IN THE BLANKS AND MAKING IT AUTHENTIC"

"The original idea was to do a trilogy, about Laika, Gagarin [the first man in space] and finally Korolev, with the final volume bringing together threads from the first two," says Abadzis. "However, in the process of research and writing, I distilled it all down into one central story and realised that all the themes I wanted to illuminate could really be done within the confines of one book."

Understandably, although he's off-stage for much of the latter part of the book, Korolev remains a driving force throughout it. "He was an extraordinary man, who almost through sheer force of will and sleight-of-hand convinced the Americans that there was a power equal to their own aero-industrial complex present in Soviet Russia, when in fact all the USA was really up against were a few well co-ordinated design and engineering bureaus," Abadzis explains.

"He was certainly a mercurial and very complex person who achieved so much under enormous pressure from his superiors. He loved his country but had a lot of

Left: On 4 April 1958, having circled the planet 2,570 times, Sputnik 2 burnt up in the Earth's atmosphere. Laika had died on the fourth orbit.

issues with the way he was treated. Reading between the lines of his documented life, I believe he was also a dreamer, a romantic of sorts. Certainly possessed of enormous passion and a huge imagination, which was balanced with serious engineering chops."

Another key character is Yelena Dubrovsky, an empathic lab assistant employed to look after the dogs used in the program. She is a fictional creation, Abadzis says: "From all the research I was doing about the way the cosmodog training program was run and the way the different Soviet bureaus interacted, it just seemed logical to me that there would be someone to fill her role. But when the book was finished one of my contacts – a guy very knowledgeable about the Soviet space program – unearthed a picture of a woman who looked just like her and who actually worked at the kennels in 1957."

And of course there's Laika herself, whose backstory is entirely imagined. Extrapolating from the fact that she was caught as a stray, Abadzis shows her being abandoned in Moscow in 1954, then surviving on the streets until dogcatchers pick her up. In an appropriate stylistic touch, her growls and barks are conveyed very much in the European comics idiom. "I'm probably as steeped in American and British comics as I am in the European stuff, so I'm not sure where that came from, other than a desire to not sound clichéd. I wanted her to be expressive, and to anthropomorphise her as little as possible, so I suppose that's where all those sorts of sound effects come from."

Having completed his research and writing, Abadzis drew the book in a "very intensive stretch that lasted about 10, maybe 11, months, as we wanted to get it out in time for the 50th anniversary of the Sputnik launches."

METHODS AND INFLUENCES

Asked how he worked, Abadzis reveals: "I drew pages first in a soft pencil, inked them using a lightbox to save time erasing the marks, then the linework was scanned and cleaned up in Photoshop. I was working with a colourist, also to save time, although all the 'painted' effects are mine – they were added at the scanning stage and put on as layers by myself with very specific instructions as to what they were and how they should look.

"The speech balloons are a part of the original art, and the text is a font based upon my own hand-lettering, but including 'variable' letters so it doesn't look too samey.

"As for my artistic influences, it's all the usual ones – a lot of Franco-Belgian cartoonists, including Hergé, Baudoin, Bob and Johan De Moor, José Muñoz, Moebius. All those guys. I don't think I can ever keep the Schulz or the Crumb or even the Posy Simmonds out of my comics work, either. And there's a very deliberate tip of the hat to Hergé in Chapter 4, which I'm sure you can spot..."

Laika won the 2008 Eisner Award for Best Publication For Teens, but it's very much a work for all ages. Its depiction of the protagonists is measured and non-judgemental, illustrating people toiling under trying circumstances. This approach, free of histrionics, makes Laika's death, silent and unseen, all the more moving. CH

Below: Abadzis fills in Laika's backstory but takes pains not to anthropomorphise her.

MUSIC FOR YOUR EYES

SOME ARTISTS TRANSCEND COMICS, AND A FEW ALSO STRETCH THE BOUNDARIES OF COMIC ART AS THEY DO SO. **ROB LANE** MEETS THE LEGENDARY **DAVE MCKEAN**

Born in Berkshire, David McKean first discovered comics when he was ill and off school. This early exposure to the likes of *Mighty World Of Marvel*, Ditko's *Spider-Man* and Curt Swan's *Superman* informed a career that has only grown over 30 years.

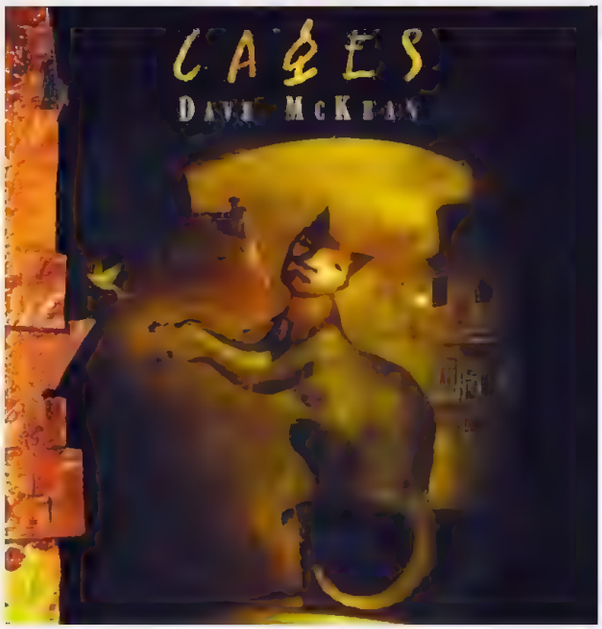
Best known for his work with Neil Gaiman and Grant Morrison, McKean created the cover for every issue of *The Sandman*, and his haunting art on 1989's *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House On Serious Earth* helped make it one of the best selling graphic novels of all time. His career also includes book covers, illustration, filmmaking and over 150 album covers...

COMIC HEROES: Were you a fan of comics as a child?

DAVE McKEAN: I was given some comics when I was off school. I must have been about 8 and I loved them, so I kept picking up all sorts of comics, whatever I could find at my local newsagent. As well as Marvel and DC I found Charlton and Gold Key comics, like *E-Man* and *Captain Atom*. Then Warren magazines, *Creepy* and *Eerie*, with all those wonderful Spanish and South American illustrators. I found Neal Adams and Berni Wrightson and Kirby's *New Gods*. Later I discovered *Heavy Metal*, and then a whole new world of mainland European comics.

CH: What were the first comics to influence your work?

DM: All of those I mentioned. I remember starting grand story ideas in many different styles, and getting up to page 4 and then bailing out and moving on to something else. Before I went to art school I also loved album cover artwork by Roger Dean, Patrick Woodroffe and others, including Barry Godber's King Crimson cover and the Hipgnosis design group album covers. And science fiction artwork from the pulps – Virgil Finlay and Anton Brzezinski. When I went to art school my whole life changed, including my taste and breadth of influences. A whole world of work opened up to me – painters, sculptors, film-makers, >



Main image: McKean by McKean.

Above: *Cages*, written and drawn by McKean, appeared as a ten-issue series, then one volume in 1998. It's now back in print from Dark Horse.

IMAGES © DAVE MCKEAN AND DARK HORSE

Left: *Arkham Asylum*, conceived from the start as a self-contained book, broke new ground in graphic storytelling.

Below: McKean adapted *Slog's Dad* for children's book publisher Walker Books from a short story by David Almond.

designers, photographers. I sucked it all up like a sponge. The big ones were Ralph Steadman and Jim Dine, who between them made me understand the expressive nature of drawing. They were my doors to a much bigger world.

CH: What got you interested in design in the first place?

DM: I wanted to illustrate the things I really loved: album covers, comics (my first love), books, film posters, that sort of thing. Before I finished my final year at art college I was already doing professional work for my tutors who ran design studios. I also published four issues of *Meanwhile...* [a small press title] with some college friends, featuring comic strips, which was seen by editors in London.

I did samples to show publishers while still in art school. The only game in town was *2000 AD*, really, so I did a sample Judge Dredd image which was published, but I had never read the magazine and wasn't a fan. The stories I did for *Meanwhile...* were more introspective: a futuristic *Blade Runner*-ish story called "Josef", a few strange shorts. The first story I had professionally published was a three-page *Mr. X* story that I wrote, drew and lettered. I transferred it to acetate and blue line, and coloured it, designed a logo for it and took it along to a London Convention in 1986, where I met Bill Sienkiewicz and showed him my portfolio. He introduced me to *Mr. X* publisher Bill Marks, who took it. *Mr. X* is a wonderful character, one of the handful of comic characters I'd still love to draw.

> "MR. X IS A WONDERFUL CHARACTER, ONE OF THE HANDFUL I'D STILL LOVE TO DRAW"

CH: Is there a comics artist who helped shape your work as a comics artist?
DM: That person has been different at different stages of my life. As a kid initially it was probably the usual Ditko/Kirby stuff. In my last year of art school, Bill Sienkiewicz and Kent Williams made big impressions on me. Now my favourites are Winsor McCay, Raymond Briggs, Moebius and Lorenzo Mattotti. My taste has changed a lot, and what I look for in a good drawing and in good storytelling has changed as well.

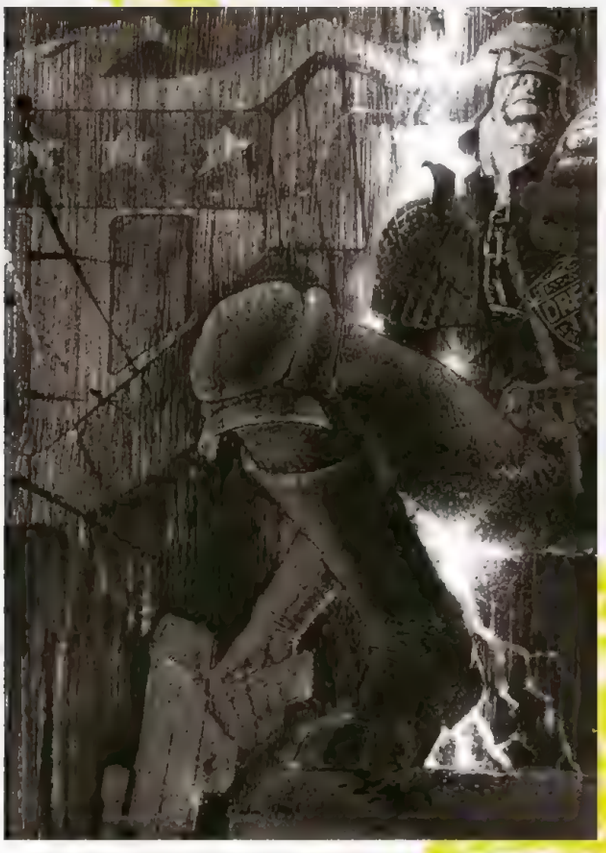
CH: What do you recall of working on *Violent Cases*, the first of your collaborations with Neil Gaiman?
DM: I was invited to contribute to a new anthology called *Borderline*, which never got off the ground. That's when I met Neil. We ended up doing *Violent Cases* for *Escape* magazine, a much longer story than the editor, Paul Gravett, had in mind, I think, so it was released as a stand-alone graphic novella. And everything progressed from there. We showed the pages to DC editors Karen Berger and Dick Giordano, and Dick in particular seemed to really like my work. He was always a big illustration fan, and took me to lunch at the American Society Of Illustrators on my first visit to the DC offices in New York. From that meeting, I started doing covers for Jamie Delano's *Hellblazer*.

Violent Cases was very easy. Neil had written a short story as part of a writer's workshop, but it wasn't broken down into comic storytelling, so I did that. I did it in between commercial jobs and a bit of teaching at my old college. I took reference photos of my old design teacher, and Neil and his >

Above left: McKean's early work on *Hellblazer* shows the influence of Bill Sienkiewicz.

Above right: One of McKean's evocative *Sandman* images.

IMAGES © DAVE MCKEAN, DC COMICS AND WALKER BOOKS



son. I had fun. Looking at it again, it's obviously influenced by Sienkiewicz and the work he'd done on *Elektra* and *Daredevil*. It's a snapshot for me of that time, meeting up with Neil in London at the Café Munchen and the SSI, starting to get the sense of a scene happening. Exciting times. But all of that was really over by 1990. I'd moved further from London, and then Neil moved to the US. I'd spent two years on DC books, and was done with that really. To do *Cages* I put away everything I'd been influenced by up until then, and tried to just draw what I felt was natural. So *Violent Cases* was my initial statement of intent. I wanted to make personal, British/European general fiction stories, and I wanted to do a series of graphic novels rather than get hitched to a long running series.

CH: You continued to work with Neil Gaiman on numerous projects: *Black Orchid, Mr Punch, Signal To Noise* – and *The Sandman*, of course...

DM: Those are all very different. *Orchid* was a mistake, really. A panic. We tried to do something that we thought they'd like. I was very grateful for the work, and happy that it had an early eco message, but that's about it. I was embarrassed when it came out, and just wanted to buy all the copies myself and burn them.

Signal and *Punch* are much more interesting, especially *Punch*. *Signal* is a more interesting theme, but we were too young to really understand and deal with it. I could do a much better job of it now. *Miracleman* was a job. *Sandman* was a lovely diary entry for seven years. I enjoyed doing them and having an ongoing place to try new things every month. I didn't realise it was making waves until it was nearly all over. Coming back to doing *Sandman* covers last year was weird and a bit scary. The pressure was on. I'm happy-ish with three of them. But the magic had gone. It was a band from the '80s getting back together again. It was of its time, really. >

Left: McKean's stunning covers for *Sandman* are certainly not your typical comic book art.

Top left: Judge Dredd by McKean, first published in the first *Judge Dredd Mega Special* in 1988.

Right: Cover art for DC's *Convergence* issue 3.

CH: What were the origins of Arkham Asylum?
DM: I wanted to do something expansive and expressionistic. I met up with Grant and he was also ready to change gear. We agreed to make it more symbolic and layered than it was originally intended to be. I enjoyed painting it, and designing it, and felt it was more interesting visually than Orchid. Then it was scanned horribly, printed poorly and bound so badly, I rarely see a first printing that doesn't have pages loose. A shame, because even though I've moved on from that style of painted comics, I occasionally see an original page and they were so much richer than any I ever saw in print.

CH: How did *Cages* come about?
DM: I wanted to create my own world, and to focus on the small details of life, the subtleties of human communication that seemed so absent in most comics. I realised I had absolutely no interest in superheroes or mainstream comics at all, and wanted to find my own voice. *Cages* is about belief, and story, and trying to find value in an often confusing world.

CH: What are you working on at the moment?
DM: The *Pictures That Tick* books are my place to put all the short stories that I've done over the years. They are either commissions or my own experiments. A short story is a wonderful place to play with a new technique or a narrative idea. They are some of my favourite things that I've done. Even though I've been tempted away to work on other projects in other media, I still think of comics as my first love and will always make comics, even if they are just these short pieces.

Celluloid is about sex. Why not? Almost all comics are about violence. I don't like violence, I don't find it amusing or particularly entertaining, and I certainly want to avoid it in my life. But sex is great, and most of us enjoy it, so why aren't there more stories exploring different aspects of sex and sexual attraction and fantasy? I have another one planned.

Above left: McKean's art makes the psychodrama of *Arkham Asylum* work.

Top right: Panels from *Signal To Noise*, written by Neil Gaiman.

Above right: More haunting *Sandman* art.

> "I DON'T LIKE VIOLENCE, I DON'T FIND IT AMUSING OR PARTICULARLY ENTERTAINING"

TU TRAITERAIS JAMAIS LES GENS COMME CA.
C'EST CA.
OUAIS.
JAMAIS.
C'EST QUE, DANS LA VIE, ON PEUT ÊTRE AMABLE AVEC LES GENS, TOUTE LA QUESTION EST LA...
BEN OUI.
UNE AUTRE BIERE?
MERCI.
BARMAN! VOUS NOUS REMETTEZ CA!

Caligari is the long book I'm doing at the moment. It is inspired by *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, and is taking a long time to complete. I'm fitting it in between other – paying – projects, so it will be another couple of years before it is released. I have another long project started, a story with fantasy illustrator Roger Dean, and I'm currently working on a secret project about an aspect of the First World War. This will be released in 2016, and I have high hopes for it.

CH: What keeps you interested in the work?

DM: It is all about the love. It's certainly not the money, and I'm not interested in trying to create a multi-platform, cross-collateralised, "trademarkable" property. I think that shift in the entertainment industry has killed creativity. So long as I can find a publisher to support me and a few readers to buy my books, then I'll keep on doing the personal, experimental, introverted stories I love. The business is rubbish, and the conventions and festivals are mostly homogenous and miserable. But the work itself at the moment has never been better. Between all the mainstream book publishers creating graphic novel lines and the small publishers springing up and supporting new voices, I think the racks have never looked more varied and inspiring.

Above left: The 1988 *Black Orchid* mini-series isn't one of McKean's most personal works but did give a whole new spin to what had been a nondescript character.

Above right: When Neil Gaiman revisited the Sandman in the prequel *Overture*, McKean also returned to provide covers. This is issue 5.

CH: What comics are you reading?

DM: I don't really. I tend to just read non-fiction these days. I try to stay up to date with the creators I really like – Stefano Ricci, Muñoz, Mattotti, Peter Sis, etc. I usually have a look around in Gosh [the London comic shop] once or twice a year to catch up. It's getting harder to keep track as there are so many new and interesting looking publishers and books around.

CH: Do you have any all-time favourites? If so, what are they?

DM: *Little Nemo* by McCay, *Fires* and *Man at the Window* by Mattotti, *When the Wind Blows* by Briggs, *Airtight Garage, Arzach* and *Eyes of the Cat* by Moebius.

The adventures of Goscinny and Uderzo's much-loved characters are being continued by affectionate new hands.

THE SHEER GAUL

After more than half a century, Asterix and Co are still going strong. James Lovegrove chronicles their history...

Asterix the Gaul was nearly Reynard the Fox.

Writer René Goscinny, born 1926, and illustrator Albert Uderzo, a year younger, were reasonably well-established French comics creators when, in 1959, they set up a new weekly *bandes dessinées* anthology, *Pilote*, at their Parisian publishing house Edifrance. It was intended to appeal to older children – even adults – and for their own contribution Goscinny and Uderzo devised a strip that would have plenty of laughs and action and a very French theme. The main character was the fox trickster hero of many a French folk tale, Reynard.

However, just two months before publication of *Pilote's* debut issue, they discovered that Reynard the Fox was already being used by another cartoonist, Jen Trubert. A rapid, radical rethink was required. Goscinny hit on the Gaulish era as a subject ripe for exploitation. Every French schoolchild is familiar with >

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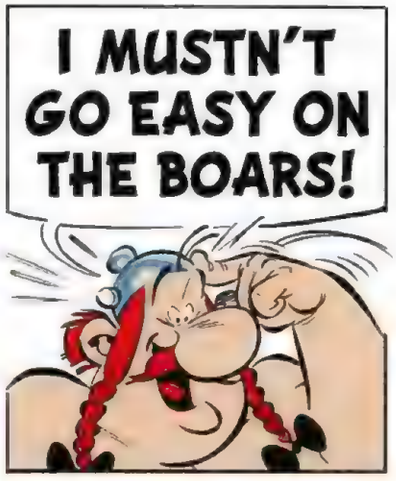
OUR STORY BEGINS IN JULIUS CAESAR'S PALACE IN ROME. JUST AS CAESAR HIMSELF IS RECEIVING HIS ADVISER AND PUBLISHER THE ELOQUENT LIBELLUS BLOCKBUSTUS ..
COMMENTARIES ON THE WAR WITH THE GAULS. NOW THERE'S A SNAPPY TITLE, O CAESAR! I FORESEE A RUNAWAY SUCCESS!
SPEAK UP, BLOCKBUSTUS! WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY MANUSCRIPT?
IT'S THIS BIT, O CAESAR!
CHAPTER XXIV
DEFEATS AT THE HANDS OF THE INDOMITABLE GAULS OF ARMORICA
YES, I KNOW, BY JUPITER, BUT SAD TO SAY THOSE ARE THE HISTORICAL FACTS!
CUT THE CHAPTER, O CAESAR! IT'S A STAIN ON YOUR CURRICULUM VITAE.
YOU WANT CAESAR TO BE ECONOMICAL WITH THE TRUTH?
ECONOMICAL? DEAR ME, NO, O CAESAR! I'M JUST SUGGESTING THAT YOU DRAW A MODEST VEIL OVER THAT CHAPTER OF HISTORY. IT'S MANY CALENDS SINCE WE HEARD ANYTHING OF THOSE GAULS. WHO IN ROME EVEN REMEMBERS THEIR EXISTENCE?
AND HOW MANY GAULS WILL OBJECT? THEY'RE ALL ILLITERATE! SO YOUR BOOK WILL PROVE THAT YOU HAVE INDEED CONQUERED ALL GAUL, AND THE SENATE WILL FINANCE YOUR OTHER CONQUESTS ...
DEVILISHLY CLEVER, BLOCKBUSTUS! IT'S TEMPTING ...
HEY, DO YOU GET ANY OF THAT GUFF?
MODERN WRITING IS A ROLLED SCROLL TO ME.



the image of Vercingetorix, defeated king of the Arvernian tribe, laying down his arms at Julius Caesar's feet. Goscinny imagined him dropping them on Caesar's feet instead, much to the conquering Roman emperor's distress.

From this initial seed, the two men together dreamed up Gaulish warrior Asterix, whose exploits would allow them to poke fun at cultural stereotypes and modern life. Uderzo originally envisaged Asterix as a muscular champion like the protagonist of his earlier strip with Goscinny, *Oumpah-Pah*, which is set in late-18th-century America and centres on a naïve Native American hero and his wilier partner, a French military officer. Goscinny preferred the idea of someone smaller and shrewder.

It was Uderzo who, mirroring the dynamic of Oumpah-Pah's lead pair, then gave Asterix a bulkier, slower-witted companion, Obelix. Around these two – polar opposites but inseparable friends – the creators conjured up a village situated somewhere in Armorica (modern-day Brittany) and full of combative eccentrics who, thanks to a magic potion that temporarily lends them superhuman strength, hold out against the invading army.

When *Pilote* launched in October 1959 it was a great success, and the *Asterix* strip, despite being an 11th-hour addition, was the readers' favourite. A first album collection, *Asterix the Gaul*, appeared in 1961, but surprisingly it sold just a few thousand copies to begin with. The follow-up, *Asterix and the Golden Sickle*, fared only a little better. It wasn't until 1965 and the sixth volume, *Asterix and Cleopatra*, that the series really took off.

To date there have (officially) been 36 *Asterix* albums, which have racked up sales totalling

Above. The creators of the latest book *Asterix and the Missing Scroll*, collaged over illustrating the originators' styles

THE BASIX
ALL THE OFFICIAL ASTERIX ALBUMS
ASTERIX THE GAUL 1961
ASTERIX AND THE GOLDEN SICKLE 1962
ASTERIX AND THE GOTHS 1963
ASTERIX THE GLADIATOR 1964
ASTERIX AND THE BANQUET 1965
ASTERIX AND CLEOPATRA 1965
ASTERIX AND THE BIG FIGHT 1966

SOME TIME LATER IN PEACEFUL ARMORICA WHERE NEWS FROM ROME IS SELDOM HEARD AND DOES NOT SEEM HALF AS INTERESTING .
OH GOOD MY GONADTAH ECHO THANKS POSTALDISTRIX
WHAT NEWS, WIFIX?
OH NOTHING EARTH-SHATTERING ROME. CAESAR'S BOOK PUBLISHED
CAESAR CAN WRITE?! I THOUGHT HE WAS A SOLDIER
A TRIUMPH! FIFTY COPIES SOLD ALREADY
A BLOCK? I HEARD ABOUT THAT AT THE HAIR
WHAT WILL THOSE ROMANS THINK OF NEXT?
IN FACT ONLY ONE PART OF THE NEWSPAPER INTERESTS THE GAULS.
HOROSCOPES BY THE DRUID APOLLODIX
AAAH! AAH! AAH!
BORN UNDER THE SIGN OF THE ELDER
THAT'S ME! THAT'S ME!
YOUR HIGH SPIRITS WILL BE APPRECIATED EXPECT TO MAKE NEW CONQUESTS

"The 36 (official) Asterix albums have sold 350 million copies worldwide"

Left: As ever, there's a balance between satire and slapstick contained within plenty of wordplay

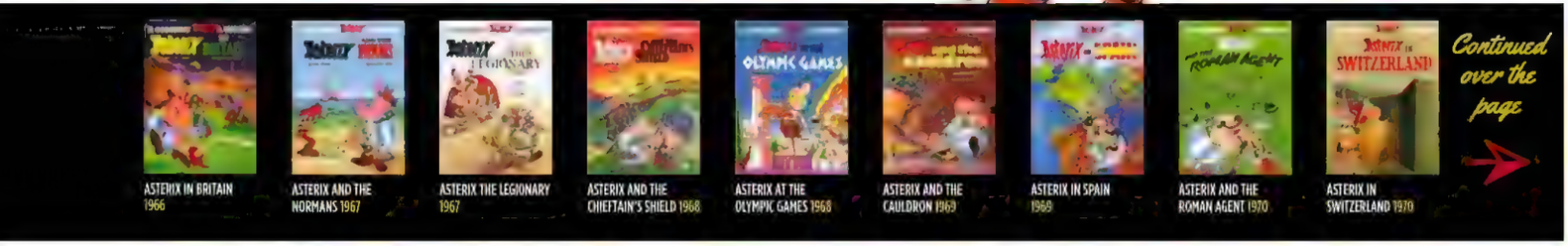
350 million copies worldwide. The series has received literary awards and earned Uderzo his homeland's highest recognition of achievement when he was made a Knight of the Légion d'Honneur in 1985. There have been numerous movies, both animated and live-action, with no less a star than Gérard Depardieu filling out the role of Obelix in the latter. There have been boardgames, videogames and game books. There is even a Parc Astérix theme park and rivalling Disneyland Paris for popularity. The indomitable Gaul continues to captivate readers even after the untimely death of Goscinny, aged just 51, in 1977. As Goscinny himself once said, "Faire rire, quel métier!" – "Making people laugh, what a job!" – and that is what he and the now-retired Uderzo did, masterfully, throughout their creative partnership and beyond.

Asterix's charm derives from its perfect balance of sophistication, satire and slapstick. Goscinny adored puns and laced his text with them, a tradition Uderzo did his best to continue in the strips he wrote as well as drew after his collaborator's death. Character names are invariably wordplay. Take the chief of Asterix's village, who is known as Abraracourcix in French (riffing on a phrase meaning "with arms up ready to fight") and as Vitalstatistix in the English-language version, which nods amusingly at his girth. Obelix's tiny but devoted mutt is Idéfix in French or Dogmatix in English. The village's resident druid is Panoramix, whom the strip's English translators have given the slightly more pointed, drug-referencing name of Getafix.

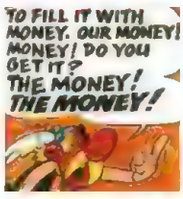
STYLISTIX

The names of the Gauls' perennial sparring partners, the Romans, offer a plethora of Latin-derived witticisms: Magnumopus, Infirmofpurpus, Gluteus Maximus and, best of all, drunken war veteran Tremensdelirius. On top of that, Goscinny garnished the strip with Latin quotations and allusions to literary classics such as *Don Quixote, Hamlet* and Caesar's own writings.

In turn, Uderzo brought both a beautiful, broad-brushstroke style and a wealth of research to the artwork. Whenever Asterix's adventures took him abroad, >


ASTERIX IN BRITAIN 1966
ASTERIX AND THE NORMANS 1967
ASTERIX THE LEGIONARY 1967
ASTERIX AND THE CHIEFTAIN'S SHIELD 1968
ASTERIX AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES 1968
ASTERIX AND THE CAULDRON 1969
ASTERIX IN SPAIN 1969
ASTERIX AND THE ROMAN AGENT 1970
ASTERIX IN SWITZERLAND 1970
Continued over the page

SAY SOMETHING! COME ON ANYTHING! WHATEVER COMES INTO YOUR HEAD.
THESE ROMANS ARE CRAZY.
WHAT?
THAT'S GOING TOO FAR! ARREST THESE MORONS WHO DARE TO INSULT THE AUTHORITY OF ROME!
VERY WELL PRODUCED, THIS SHOW.
YES IT'S GETTING GOOD!
THEY'RE OVERDOING IT A BIT NOW; THAT'S NOT VERY LIFELIKE.
OH IT'S THE NEW DRAMATIC CONVENTION. PERSONALLY I THINK IT'S EFFECTIVE.
COME ON! WE DON'T WANT TO HANG AROUND! THIS IS NONE OF OUR BUSINESS. WE'VE GOT BETTER THINGS TO DO
LATER, OUTSIDE THE TOWN JAIL..
WOULD YOU LIKE US TO GET YOU OUT OF THERE?
NO FEAR! I'VE JUST BEEN BOOKED FOR THE CIRCUS AT ROME. A ONE-NIGHT STAND, OF COURSE, BUT WHAT A SHOW! LIONS, TIGERS, THE WHOLE WORKS! DEAD GOOD!
BY THE WAY, FATSO- YOU OUGHT TO GO IN FOR THE THEATRE DEAR. WHAT PERSONALITY! WHAT A GALL!



Above and left: At their peak in the 60s–70s, several Uderzo productions a year, often two, ever...

Uderzo often visited the country concerned and took countless reference photos. This and plenty of historical research resulted in gorgeous, detailed images such as the sweeping splash shot of Rome and the contrasting, equally lively shot of Gaulish capital Lutetia that open *Asterix and the Laurel Wreath*, and the lush views of the forested valleys of Corsica's interior in *Asterix in Corsica*.

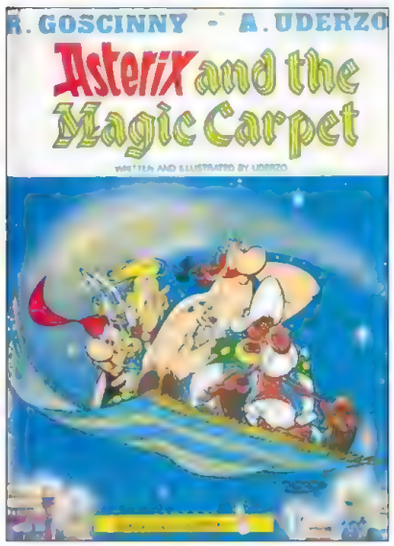
There are also clever sight gags, whether it's the double-decker public transport cart in *Asterix in Britain* or the parody of Géricault's famous painting "The Raft of the Medusa" in the panel showing shipwrecked pirates in *Asterix the Legionary*. Not to mention frequent appearances by chickens. Uderzo has been inordinately fond of the birds ever since, as a boy, he got into the habit of dropping a neighbour's chickens out of a first-storey window and watching them flap – safely – to the ground.

Another of Uderzo's artistic flourishes is guest appearances by famous faces from the silver screen and public life. Some of these are characters who play a significant role in the tales, such as the distinctly Churchillian English chief Mykingdomforanos in *Asterix in Britain* and the Roman spy Dubbelosix in *Asterix and the Black Gold*, who bears more than a passing resemblance to Sean Connery. Others are background cameos, like Charlton "Ben-Hur" Heston driving a chariot in *Asterix and the Golden Sickle*, one-time French president Jacques Chirac buying a menhir in *Obelix and Co.*, and Laurel and Hardy as Roman legionaries in the same album.

The satirical elements of the stories are also an integral part of the mix. One cannot help but see the essential conceit of a Gaulish village holding out against the invaders who otherwise control the entire country as a commentary on the Nazi occupation of France during World War II, which would have been painfully fresh in everyone's memories when the strip was created.

Individual albums also have points to make about contemporary issues. *The Mansions of the Gods* sees our heroes battling against the forces of modernisation, as a Roman housing development near the village threatens to destroy the local ecology and the Gauls' way of life. Both *Asterix and the Cauldron* and *Obelix and Co.* mock rampant capitalism and cupidity. *Asterix*

THE MANSIONS OF THE GODS 1971
ASTERIX AND THE LAUREL WREATH 1972
ASTERIX AND THE SOOTHSAYER 1972
ASTERIX IN CORSICA 1973
ASTERIX AND CAESAR'S GIFT 1974
ASTERIX AND THE GREAT CROSSING 1975
OBELIX AND CO. 1976
ASTERIX IN BELGIUM 1979
ASTERIX AND THE GREAT DIVIDE 1980
ASTERIX AND THE BLACK GOLD 1981



and the Olympic Games, with its subtext about fair play in sport and athletes cheating, seems more pertinent than ever in our era of corruption, bribery and doping scandals, while *Asterix and Caesar's Gift* slyly critiques politicians and electioneering.

In addition, slapstick, bouts of drunken misbehaviour and pratfalls are par for the course, and Asterix and friends are never far away from the next punch-up. When the Gaulish villagers aren't giving the Romans a good bashing, they're laying into one another. The main culprit here is temperamental blacksmith Fulliautomatix, who bickers and brawls constantly with his commercial rival, fishmonger Unhygienix, and will not hesitate to hammer tone-deaf bard Cacophonix into submission rather than tolerate his dreadful music and unendurable singing.

The violence, though, is genial, knockabout stuff. Nobody is ever seriously hurt, and quite often the Romans have relieved, delirious smiles on their faces as they hurtle through the air or lie insensible on the ground. It's as if they would rather be injured, and therefore removed from the fray, than fight.

LINGUISTIX

Although *Asterix* has been published in almost every major language, there's no question that much of the series' huge appeal in the UK and other Anglophone territories is down to the justly-renowned English translations by Anthea Bell and Derek Hockridge.

Bell is a linguist of some repute, with the remarkable ability to learn a new language in just a few weeks, and ascribes her gift for wordplay – an essential part of the job when rendering Goscinny's text into English – to being the daughter of pioneering *Times* cryptic crossword compiler Adrian Bell. Hockridge, who died in 2013, was a lecturer in modern languages and a regular visitor to France, which gave him a broad, up-to-date knowledge of that nation's topical humour and cultural references.

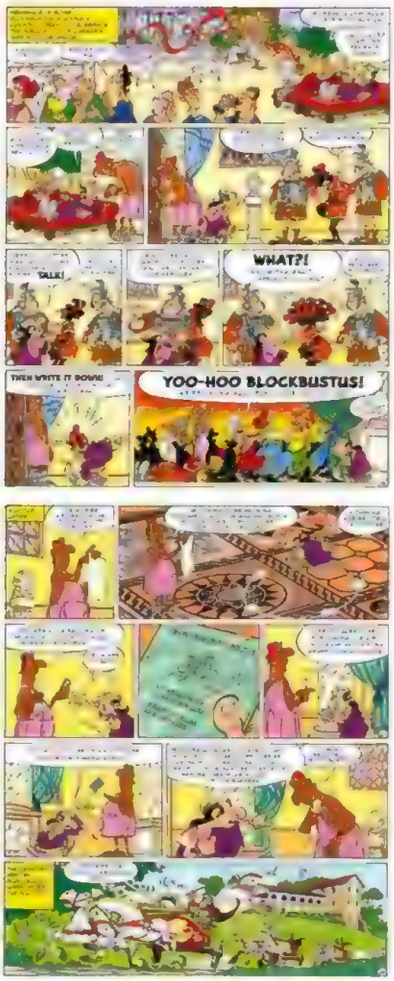
Working as a team, Bell and Hockridge applied a set of six basic principles to the task of making the strip intelligible to an English-speaking audience. Among these was the aim of reproducing as faithfully as possible the feel of the original but, where necessary, finding jokes which are different but along the same lines as the French jokes. Just as important was keeping the same ratio of types of joke as the original, and the same quantity of jokes.

When it comes to naming the characters, in some cases Bell and Hockridge improve on Goscinny's original efforts. >

> "In some cases the English names of characters improve on the originals"

Left: After Goscinny's death, Uderzo's solo stories took things in new – not always well received – directions

ASTERIX AND SON 1983
ASTERIX AND THE MAGIC CARPET 1987
ASTERIX AND THE SECRET WEAPON 1991
ASTERIX AND OBELIX: ALL AT SEA 1996
ASTERIX AND THE ACTRESS 2001
ASTERIX AND THE FALLING SKY 2005
ASTERIX AND OBELIX'S BIRTHDAY 2009
ASTERIX AND THE PICTS 2013
ASTERIX AND THE MISSING SCROLL 2015



Cacophonix, for instance, is a much funnier and more apposite name for the bard than Assurancetourix, which plays on the French for "comprehensive insurance".

The earliest Asterix albums all have much to recommend them, but both creators' styles were still evolving. With the arrival of the fourth book, *Asterix the Gladiator*, everything came together and gelled. The art became smoother and slicker, the facial expression meticulous, while the plots got cleverer and more complex and the jokes more polished. The inevitable final-panel coda, in which the villagers sit down to a firelit feast of wild boar and everyone is reconciled, was already a fixture from the start, but running gags now began to be established. Foremost among these is the recurring appearance of the hapless pirate crew whom our heroes habitually meet on their travels and just as habitually leave bobbing in the sea surrounded by wreckage and flotsam. Vitalstatistix's inept shield bearers have proved another source of repeat-use comedy gold, as has his doughty, nagging wife Impedimenta, whose name is another word for "baggage".

1965's *Asterix and Cleopatra* is widely regarded as the series' zenith. Not only is the book ravishingly beautiful to behold, every page a treat for the eyes, but it has a compelling storyline – our heroes decamp to Alexandria to help architect Edifis build a palace for the Egyptian queen to prove to Caesar that hers is not a backward nation – and some tremendous jokes, from the hieroglyph-filled speech bubbles denoting Egyptian dialogue to the scene where Obelix accidentally snaps the nose off the Sphinx at Giza.

Above: Like the classic stories, *Asterix and the Missing Scroll* draws on current events and topical issues.

AESTHETIX

Equally cherishable is 1966's *Asterix in Britain*, where Goscinny gave full rein to his tendency to lampoon national stereotypes, but affectionately. British readers, with a national taste for self-deprecating humour, have themselves warmly embraced being gently caricatured as tweedy, stiff-upper-lip types with an abiding love of tea, angling and gardening. *Asterix the Legionary*, which offsets its send-up of militarism with a story of young star-crossed lovers, is also a gem, as is *Asterix in Spain*, which does for the Spanish what *Asterix in Britain* did for the British.

Unfortunately the solo offerings from Uderzo, in the wake of Goscinny's death, lack the same spark. There are glimmers of the old greatness in *Asterix and Son*, where our hero is unwillingly lumbered with the care of an abandoned baby, and *Asterix and the Secret Weapon*, which brings feminism to the hitherto male-dominated village. Uderzo, however, began introducing jarring fantasy touches into his plots, such as a flying carpet in *Asterix and the Magic Carpet* and, worse, extraterrestrials in *Asterix and the Falling Sky*. Granted, Getafix's strength-imbuing potion is itself a fantastical plot device, but even the most devoted readers found spell-casting Indian wizards and hovering alien spaceships too incongruous, an imaginary stretch too far.

Once Uderzo stepped away from his drawing board for good after 2009's 50th anniversary celebration *Asterix and Obelix's Birthday: The Golden Book*, it seemed as though Asterix would never sally forth on another adventure. That was until two new creators were appointed to carry on the series, with Uderzo's blessing. First with *Asterix and the Picts* in 2013 and lately *Asterix and the Missing Scroll*, writer Jean-Yves Ferri and artist Didier Conrad have produced pitch-perfect pastiches.

Both men were born in 1959, the same year as Asterix, and grew up reading and loving the strip, and their affinity for the material is clear. Their version of Asterix, with Bell still providing sterling English translation, is arguably the equal of anything Goscinny and Uderzo managed in their heyday. It looks like the series is in safe hands and Goscinny and Uderzo's warm-hearted, scrappy, petulant but above all lovable characters will be with us for many years to come. CH

Below: Old favourite characters and running jokes are all present and correct, and kept fresh.

CREATING NEW CLASSIX

The creators of Asterix and the Missing Scroll, Jean-Yves Ferri and Didier Conrad, tell us about the latest book

CH: Was it intimidating, taking over the *Asterix* series from its creators? Those are very big shoes to fill...
J-YF: Yes, absolutely, it was intimidating. *Asterix* is an institution in France and these would have been some of the first comics that we would have read as children, so obviously yes, it's intimidating.
DC: It was also really impressive to meet Monsieur Uderzo, who is just a legend and whose name has been known to us since we were children. He isn't somebody that's very easy to meet, say at conventions or exhibitions, because he is so above the rest when it comes to sales and popularity generally that he's isolated by that.

CH: Jean-Yves, has your own humorous style of writing been inspired by that of Goscinny?
J-YF: It goes without saying, I think, that I would have been influenced by Goscinny because he has created his own genre in classic French comics. And so even if one expresses oneself in a different style, he would be a reference and he would feature as an influence.

CH: Didier, was it easy to adapt your artistic style to mimic Uderzo's?
DC: Yes and no. My personal style is within the same group, if you like, or the same family, the same school; but at the same time having to mimic very closely his style, then yes, that was challenging.

CH: How did Uderzo himself react to the two new Asterix albums?
J-YF: He caught us both under his arms and just squeezed us very tightly. That was his way of expressing his joy. Hopefully!
DC: He was actually more worried in terms of the drawing because he had absolutely irrational faith and trust in Jean-Yves when it came to the scenario and the writing, but he was worried that if the graphics weren't quite right, the outcome would be rejected by the general public. Which was not the case.

CH: Have you had any complaints from Scottish people about how they're depicted in *Asterix and the Picts*? The Scots can be sensitive!
J-YF: I can tell you an anecdote on this. It was thought that perhaps the album was very related to the referendum that was taking place in Scotland, and just as a joke, because I've also written a book separately on de Gaulle, I had just said to parody de Gaulle, "Vive l'Écosse libre!" (live free Scotland), and that was taken seriously and I did have a couple of problems following that.
DC: It was irrational, what he did, but it works. Irrational and irresponsible.
J-YF: But Didier is rational, so there's a balance.

CH: *Asterix and the Missing Scroll* carries on the Asterix tradition of satire. Was it important to you to say something about the age of Wikileaks and Julian Assange?
DC: Yes, for me that was actually the initial starting point to the storyline. For Jean-Yves it was more about the war of the Gauls, but then we sort of joined up along the way.

CH: It's nice to see Impedimenta and Cacophonix get more to do in *Asterix and the Missing Scroll*. Are there other supporting characters you'd like to see have bigger roles?
J-YF: Yes, that is an angle that we're looking to develop in the next storylines, to develop different aspects to their personalities. In this case we have also developed Getafix a little bit more – we've revealed some details from his youth, for example, and that's just another way of finding new things to develop.

CH: Are there plans for a third album from you? Please say yes.
J-YF and DC: Yes!

CH: Which Asterix character do you most resemble? Be honest!
J-YF: Dogmatix.
DC: We are real people! We are not like the characters in *Asterix*. Our noses are too small. We're working on the noses, but for the time being they're still too small.

DANGER, DANGER! HIGH VOLTAGE!

WRITER AND ELECTRICOMICS CO-FOUNDER **LEAH MOORE** TALKS TO SOME OF THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE GROUNDBREAKING DIGITAL COMICS PLATFORM – INCLUDING HER FATHER, **ALAN MOORE**

It's been two years since Alan Moore's production company, Orphans Of The Storm, announced Electricomics – a digital comics project in partnership with app developers Ocasta, researchers Alison Gazzard and Daniel Merlin Goodbrey, and funded by The Digital R&D Fund for the Arts.

In September 2015 we launched the *Electricomics* digital comic reader app in the iOS App Store, and on the app, four new comics by Garth Ennis and Frank Victoria; Peter Hogan and Paul Davidson; Alan Moore and Colleen Doran, and myself, John Reppion and Nicola Scott.

In addition, the *Generator* is a piece of desktop freeware which lets anybody make their own digital comic, and all the code went up on github.com/Electricomics, open sourced under a GPL licence.

With Electricomics live, I interviewed some of the people involved to get their take on the project so far.

GIUILIA ALFONSI

Giulia was responsible for the construction and coding of the project. One might assume she was fluent in comics already, but it seems she's just a fast learner.

LM: What was your experience of comics prior to the project? Have you always been a fan?

GA: I had a basic knowledge of comics and webcomics. I used to read Disney comics when I was a kid, and nowadays I read daily web strips, but I never got interested enough to think about the long and hard work behind them. It may sound silly, but even the concept that different people do different parts of a comic (the story, the

drawings, the lettering, the colouring) was totally unknown to me. So yeah, I had no idea what I was jumping into, but that was the reason why I decided to do it.

LM: You've been the lynchpin of the whole project. What was the biggest challenge for you?

GA: The biggest challenge I faced was trying to translate the scripts of *Big Nemo* and *Second Sight* into the digital medium. As they were experiments, I had to try a lot of different combinations of animations and visual effects within the boundaries of the web technologies to reproduce what the authors had in mind, without overwhelming the readers but still making the authors happy. For the future I have a lot of ideas, mostly about how to improve *Generator* and make it easier for people to use. I really love creating tools to make other people's lives easier. My brain is constantly thinking about it.

TSVI LEBETKIN

The four comics included with the app are not just content to display, they represent different approaches to comics, and are all intended to inspire creators to experiment. This is the gauntlet thrown down by the project: don't just read this, make something. One man who has risen to that challenge is Tsvi Lebetkin of biblicalcomix.com. He was one of the first to use *Generator* to adapt his comics to the Electricomics format.

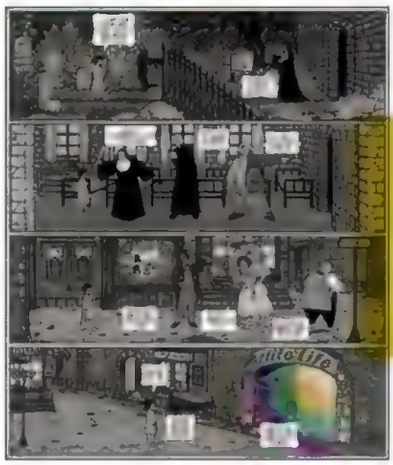
LM: What was it that attracted you to Electricomics?

TL: I first heard of it from an article on bleedingcool.com, and it was having Alan Moore attached to it made me immediately sit up and take note. He's famously been quite uninterested in technology and how it's shifted the way we live our lives – and chosen not to adopt much that it offered. So, for someone like him to bring his lifetime's worth of experience and innate understanding of the medium to the project made it something I was eager to look into.

And it looks like I was right to be excited, because, whilst it's early days yet and there's plenty of room for it to grow, the user experience of reading an Electricomic is pretty much perfectly balanced between all that is good about sequential storytelling, married with the capabilities of these new devices.

LM: Thank you! You are one of the first Small Press people to really embrace our format. How well do you think the small press scene responds to digital?

TL: Well, the small press should *love* digital, but it seems to be a bit embarrassed by it at times. What the creators of small press crave is legitimacy, and nothing gives that right now like print. I think one reason for that may be because the mainstream press hasn't *really* embraced digital yet, except in piracy. Electricomics solved this conundrum in a pretty interesting way. It offers *way* more than a static PDF but without betraying what comics are (which I think [happens] when there is too much animation and sound). And it's all >



PHOTOGRAPH © 2016 BEN COLLIER AND ELECTRICOMICS

Left: The Electricomics app, with an initial four stories, is free on the iOS App Store.

Above: Some familiar faces are involved in the Electricomics project. From the left: Alan Moore, Leah Moore and Mitch Jenkins.

Right: Alan Moore and Colleen Doran's *Big Nemo* makes striking use of the format's new storytelling options.

LOTTERY FUNDED | Supported by Nesta, Arts & Humanities Research Council and public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England

Top to bottom: *Sway* by Leah Moore and John Reppion with art by Nicola Scott; *Red Horse* by Garth Ennis and Frank Victoria; and WB Yeats' poem "When You Are Old" as adapted by S James Abbott.

"WE'VE ASSEMBLED THE MEANS TO CREATE A NEW FORM OF COMIC"

achievable on a small to zero budget by knuckle-dragging small-press luddites, like myself. So, yes, much to learn there still – but thankfully there now is actually something new to learn.

ALAN MOORE

Tzvi says it was Alan Moore's name that sold him on the idea of Electricomics, and it's true, Alan has from the very earliest days of his career experimented with the form. He is held responsible for reinventing comics and for bringing more depth to the medium. This has neatly disguised the fact that he is also profoundly silly.

LM: Has the project changed your attitude to digital comics?

AM: Well, the experience of handling a digital narrative has probably given me an attitude to digital comics rather than changed one that was already there. My only pre-existing opinion of digital comic-books was my standard opinion of any new thing, like special edition lime-and-white-chocolate Kit Kats or grafting a dog's head onto a pigeon: it's against God and Nature; surely the Last Days are upon us; comics were never better than when they were gouged into a piece of bark with a boar's tusk, and so on. I'm sure you've heard all these arguments before, and you'll know that with a little experience I generally modify my attitude and take a more moderate position, where I'll concede that if it was, say, a Chihuahua and a bulky enough wood-pigeon it probably wouldn't look too bad.

This was the case with Electricomics. I don't think I'd do anything differently, looking back, in that I still think that my relatively cautious approach to the medium (compared to the more adventurous *Sway* and *Cabaret Amygdala*) was the best way for me to approach things, at least on that first outing. I was using techniques, often based upon Winsor McCay's storytelling ideas, that I was fairly sure would work, especially in the hands of superb craftswoman like Colleen. Any further ventures, though, I think I'd be looking for something a bit more radical, at least in my terms. I was interested in some of the possibilities that Daniel outlined at the beginning, such as combining a comic and a playable game. Knowing nothing about games, that sounds like something that might provide a certain amount of maddening fun to keep my synapses firing.

LM: What about the big pitch behind Electricomics, of a new way to self-publish digital comics. Have we lived up to that?

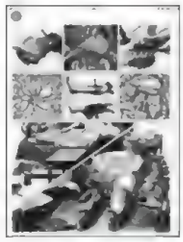
AM: I think that we've certainly succeeded in accomplishing our initial aims. We've hopefully assembled the means to create a radically new form of comic, and the means to publish those works once they've been conceived and created. I think we may have gone further than that, in providing

NEW GUINEA, YES.
OF COURSE I REMEMBER HIM.
YOU DON'T FORGET PATIENTS LIKE THAT ONE.
X-RAY
SO WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM?
"HE'D BEEN HIT BY A TAXI.
"I DON'T THINK HE REALISED WE DRIVE ON THE LEFT OVER HERE.
"I THINK THAT MUST HAVE BEEN A PART OF HIS... RELIGION. ANYWAY, HE WAS GETTING QUITE DISTRAUGHT ABOUT IT... BUT DOCTOR WELLS WAS BRILLIANT, CALMED HIM RIGHT DOWN.
"HE TOLD HIM ABOUT HOW TRANSPLANTS WERE SORT OF A BIT LIKE BEING EATEN-- THAT PARTS OF HIM COULD GO ON IN SOMEONE ELSE."
"HE WAS DRIFTING IN AND OUT OF CONSCIOUSNESS, BUT I THINK HE KNEW HE WAS DYING...
"HE KEPT TRYING TO MAKE US PROMISE TO EAT HIM AFTER HE WAS DEAD...
SO WE GOT HIM TO SIGN A DONOR CARD, AND THEN HE JUST RELAXED AND WENT TO SLEEP.
HE DIED AN HOUR OR SO LATER.
IS THAT ALL YOU NEED? ONLY I'VE GOT TO GO NOW.
YES, OF COURSE.

examples of some very different ways to approach this new medium. That said, there is always much further to go, especially when we're here at the formation of this new medium (which I suspect it is. I imagine comics and digital comics will continue to diversify until digital diverges into an entirely separate species of the comic-book genus). The big breakthroughs are still in the future, and we'll only know for sure that we've gone far enough when we notice that people are fainting, screaming, covering their melting eyes, and telling us we've gone too far.

LM: Have you seen any of the comics people have made using the *Generator*?

AM: I enjoyed Tim West and Carol Kewley's "Mirror Mirror" as a neat and economical horror story with a haunting and original idea at its kernel, told without words and working very well with the footstep-like tread of the advancing panels. I also liked "Die Träume", which, while conventional in its story progression, made up for it with its Max Ernst sensibilities and suggested a new approach to surrealist collage as a kind of narrative. Tzvi Lebetkin's "The Tower of Man" caught my eye for the way that it revealed its visual and verbal information, and effects such as the closing panels showing the Hiroshima-like whiteout with the images being shunted to the left by fresh ones arriving on the right.



Top: *Cabaret Amygdala Presents Second Sight* by Peter Hogan and Paul Davidson

Above: From *Die Träume* – not for the squeamish!

Perhaps my favourite piece I've seen thus far has been S. James Abbott's "When You Are Old", which I thought was a piece of innovative storytelling that allowed Yeats' poem to blossom. The multiple camera angles and split-screen effects, along with the beautiful grace notes like the falling teardrops, all made for an impeccable piece of work.

I've recently been checking out some of the new Poetry Comics, courtesy of the excellent poet Chrissy Williams and cartoonist/cultural commentator Tom Humberstone, and on reading "When You Are Old" it struck me that this kind of application of digital comics technology might work very well indeed with the kind of fusion that Chrissy and Tom are cultivating. There are lots of fresh new possibilities which seem to be coming to the fore at present, and lots of fresh new synaptic connections to be made between them, and on the strength of what I've seen so far, digital comics might be an extremely important vector of the kind of culture we have coming up in the imminent future. We're certainly off to an exceptional start.

LM: Lastly, if I went back in a time machine to St Andrews Road in 1965, knocked on your door and gave you an iPad with *Big Nemo* on it, what would you have made of it? Would young Alan Moore have been impressed?

AM: So, assuming you could actually do some sort of *Sway* thing and lean back into 1965, turn up at 17 St Andrews Road and show me *Big Nemo*, would I have been impressed? Well, while I'd doubtless have been stunned by the technology and a bit depressed by the content, I think my overall reaction would have probably been to fear you. And, seriously, if you do figure out how to do this, then don't show it to my Gran, or she'll have you burned as a witch in that little meadow across the street where the Super Sausage overnight lorry park is now. There were women burned in that meadow for owning transistor radios and binoculars. I know that 1965 seems a little late for witch burnings, but this is St Andrew's Road that we're talking about. And anyway, what if she just died of shock and caused a classic paradox? Although, thinking about it, since she'd already have birthed my mum, that probably wouldn't be an issue. But don't do it, anyway. I know you're not a child anymore and I can't tell you what to do, but for Christ's sake leave the laws of space and time alone or I'll, I don't know, ground you or something. You've been warned.

HOW TO MAKE AN ELECTRICOMIC

If you'd like to make an Electricomic yourself, you can take part in the third official challenge, "Keyhole Comics". Make an Electricomic using tiny little panels or pages. Comics small enough to view on a smart watch. Comics where there is one page and lots of tiny little drawings. Send the direct link to @Electricomics.

The challenge finishes on 29 February 2016.

To download the iOS app go to **tinyurl.com/electricomicsiPadapp**

To get the Generator go to **github.com/electricomics/generator**

To get more comics for the app, read the Final Report or watch complete footage of the symposium, and for the full version of all of these interviews as I post them, go to **electricomics.net**

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THE MAN BEHIND THARG

CAVAN SCOTT TALKS TO MATT SMITH ABOUT EDITING THE GALAXY'S GREATEST COMIC, FUTURE SHOCKS AND DESTROYING MEGA-CITY ONE...

Unless you've been living on Luna 1 for the last 38 years, you know that *2000 AD* is edited by a sometimes cranky, but always thrill-powered, extraterrestrial from the planet Quaxxann. But the shocking truth is that – whisper it – Tharg the Mighty isn't real. Yes, we know, we'll probably receive a Rigelian Hotshot for even suggesting such a thing. But in reality nine very-human editors have occupied Tharg's Betelgeusian boots, the current and longest-serving of them all being Matt Smith.

"I started getting *2000 AD* back in 1985 when I was around 12 years old," Smith recalls. It was a natural progression for this young comic fan's reading habits. After reading British children's comics like *The Beano*, Smith graduated to the '80s revival of *Eagle*, but admits that he soon "got fed up with that", and so picked up his first Prog instead. "I immediately fell in love with *2000 AD*, and carried on buying it up to the point that I eventually became editor in December 2001."

Top: Reader favourites include the venerable *Judge Dredd* and more recent *Red Seas*

Above: Editor Matt Smith (no relation to the actor).

Smith went from being a Squaxx dek Thargo to being Tharg himself when *2000 AD's* then-publisher Egmont advertised for an assistant editor. Dave Bishop, the editor at the time, had resigned, with Andy Diggle stepping up but in need of an assistant. After years of working in book publishing, Smith applied and got the job the same month that Rebellion purchased *2000 AD* from Egmont.

Two years later it was Diggle's turn to leave to pursue a writing career. Smith was promoted to editor, and the new Tharg had a clear vision for the Galaxy's Greatest Comic: "I knew I had to maintain a stable line-up. I've always felt that *2000 AD* was at its weakest when it chopped and changed, with characters appearing only to soon disappear again."

Smith remembered the impact that classic strips had had on him in his early days, specifically "Rage", a *Strontium Dog* storyline that saw fan-favourite Wulf Sternhammer murdered. Gripped, the young Smith had sought out Johnny Alpha's backstory, devouring issue after issue of >

> "YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW ALL THE BACKSTORY, JUST ENJOY A REALLY EXCITING STRIP WITH AMAZING ARTWORK"

The Best of 2000 AD. "That's when *2000 AD* is at its strongest, when it maintains a good set of recurring characters. I wanted to set up stories that had potential to provide multiple ongoing series."

Smith was soon commissioning strips that would come to be regarded as modern *2000 AD* classics, including *The Red Seas* by Ian Edginton and Steve Yeowell, a swashbuckling tale that mixed piracy with diabolical magic. Another favourite was *Kingdom* by Dan Abnett and Richard Elson. "It's a really good post-apocalyptic saga with a Conan-esque genetically engineered dog soldier," Smith enthuses. "You don't need to know all the backstory, just enjoy a really exciting strip with amazing artwork."

CLASSIC CHARACTERS

As well as ploughing new ground, Smith brought back some old favourites, including Bill Savage, a grizzled resistance fighter from an alternative history, and the aforementioned Strontium Dog, who had been sent to meet his maker back in 1990. More recently, readers were delivered another blast from the comic's past. *Bad Company* – created in 1986 by Peter Milligan, Brett Ewins and Jim McCarthy – was the story of a visceral future war inspired by *Apocalypse Now* and *Heart of Darkness*. In true *2000 AD* tradition, it was wonderfully anarchic, complete with trippy black-and-white imagery and a Frankenstein's Monster of a commander in the form of combat-addicted Kano.

But how did Smith decide that the time was right to revisit the battlefields of Ararat? "*Bad Company's* return dates back a little while," he explains. "Peter had been discussing new stories with Brett, but unfortunately Brett was just too ill to work on it." Ewins would sadly pass away in February 2015, a month before

Above left: Pirates, zombies and magic mix in *The Red Seas*.

Above: The dystopian *Kingdom* stars the wittily named Gene the Hackman.

2015 saw the *Judge Dredd Megazine* celebrate its 25th anniversary, and also marked Smith's tenth year as editor. "David Bishop was editing the *Megazine* when I took over *2000 AD*," Smith recalls, "and was succeeded by Alan Barnes in 2002. When Alan resigned in 2005, I was ready for a new challenge and offered to edit them both."

In recent years, the *Megazine* has seen creator-owned content such as Simon Spurrier and PJ Holden's *Numbercruncher* rubbing shoulders with further tales of Mega-City One.

"It started when Rufus Dayglo approached me in 2007. He was producing new *Tank Girl* material with Alan Martin and wondered if I would be interested in it for *2000 AD*. While I wasn't keen about anything that wasn't owned by us appearing in the Prog, I thought it would be a great fit for the *Megazine*." The creator-owned slot in the *Meg* was created.

"From my point of view, it means that the *Megazine* features entirely new content. As it's creator-owned, the writers and artist get a reduced page rate, meaning I get 10 to 15 pages for far less than if we owned the rights. The advantage for the creators is that they get paid upfront, plus, as we only take first-publication rights, they can do what they want with it once it's been in the *Megazine*."

2000 AD announced that *Bad Company* would return to service, with *Tank Girl's* Rufus Dayglo providing pencils. "I got in touch with Peter, and asked him if he'd do something new. *Bad Company* was the first thing he suggested."

However, Kano and company would never have lived to fight another day if the story hadn't been right: "We only bring characters back if there's a tale worth telling. I don't want *2000 AD* to become a nostalgia-fest, catering only for people who can remember stories from 30 years ago."

This is why we're unlikely to see any more missions for Rogue Trooper any time soon. Debuting in 1981, *Rogue Trooper* told the story of a blue-skinned deserter searching for his treacherous supreme commander in the midst of a perpetual war. "Once Rogue found the Traitor General, he was a character missing a motivation. There's not a lot more to do with him." Rogue may have gone, but

Above: A memorable cover painting by Jim Murray for *Red Seas'* "Hollow Land" story arc.

MOST OF MY WEAPON'S AMMO GONE ALREADY IN SECONDS. I'LL BE OUT COMPLETELY.
ALL THIS SUICIDAL MADNESS —
SOMEWHERE IN THE TWO HELLS, TRAINING SERGEANT STRAEKU LAUGHS IN DISDAIN, HIS JUDGEMENT OF ME CONFIRMED. PERHAPS MY BROTHER VADIM IS THERE TO AGREE WITH HIM
KLIK KLIK KLIK KLIK
PERHAPS SOMEWHERE IN HIS HIGH CASTLE MY FATHER SENSES HIS BLOODLINE ABOUT TO COME TO AN END AND MAYBE EVEN FEELS SOMETHING APPROACHING REGRET
THERE'S SOME FOOL'S PARADISE WHERE THIS PLAN ACTUALLY WORKED —
ATALIA THIS IS KOLONEL HERRIA YOU'VE DONE A FINE
NOW MY MEN AND I WILL TIDY UP THIS STRIGOI HUNT FOR YOU.
SCORCHED EARTH!

Smith has kept his world alive with a long-line of spinoffs set in the same universe, the most recent of which is *Jaegir*, written by Gordon Rennie with art by Simon Coleby and Len O'Grady.

But surely in comics the end of a story doesn't mean it can't be retold? DC and Marvel constantly revamp not only characters, but often their entire universes. Could we ever see a reboot of *Rogue Trooper*, reimagining the story for a new generation? Smith thinks not.

Above: *Jaegir* is set in the world of *Rogue Trooper* but some time later, and it focuses on the Norts, who were the "enemy" in the original.

"It all comes down to personal taste," he admits. "If I don't think the story's there, I'm not one for rebooting for the sake of it."

HE IS THE LAW!

Popular though Johnny Alpha and *Rogue Trooper* have been, there's one character that is synonymous with *2000 AD*. From his first appearance in Prog 2, Judge Dredd has brought his particular brand of brutal justice to the streets of Mega-City One for the best part of three decades. He's survived robot uprisings, nuclear holocaust, alien superfiends and zombie outbreaks – and yet nothing has prepared Old Stony Face for the disasters rained down on his beloved city during Smith's editorship.

The recent "Day of Chaos" story-arc saw 87 percent of Mega-City One's population wiped out by a biological agent, and peace-loving citizens transformed into crazed killers. Over 48 issues, the Chaos Bug left over 350 million people dead and Mega-City One in ruins. How much planning goes into this and other Dredd epics? According to Smith, it all boils down to what the writers pitch. In the case of "Day of Chaos", the carnage began with a call from Dredd's co-creator, John Wagner. "John told me that he'd had an idea about a Psi-Judge receiving a vision of impending disaster around the time of the Mega-City One Mayoral Elections. That idea soon grew. By the time the Dark Judges showed up, even I was taken aback by the scale of the disaster. When the Statue of Judgement came crashing down and

> "IT'S BECOMING INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO FIND WORK FOR ALL THE ARTISTS WHO WANT TO DRAW FOR 2000 AD"

the Academy of Law was burnt to the ground, I contacted John. 'How far are we taking this?' I asked. 'Is any of MC1 going to be left?'"

Of course, such devastation is just the latest of Wagner's long list of acts against the people of Mega-City One. How involved is the writer in Dredd's ongoing story? "John's fairly hands-off about other stuff going on in Mega-City One," Smith says. "He only writes what he wants to write. I tend to get scripts from John when he's ready. You learn to work around that. Plus, he's keen to slow up his work rate these days. He's been doing this for over 30 years and isn't the kind of writer that can just hack it out. If he feels like he's covering old ground or isn't feeling the story, he just won't do it. That's why we bring writers such as Rob Williams and Mike Carroll on board. Rob's stories tend to be more humorous, while Mike finds new ways to draw something fresh from Dredd's backstory, to put a new slant on it. John's always said that he doesn't want people to mimic him but bring their own voice to the strip."

FRESH VOICES

Finding new voices for *2000 AD* has never been a problem, although Smith admits the comic is tough to break into, and for good reason. "It's becoming increasingly difficult to find work for all the artists who want to draw for *2000 AD*. We only have a limited amount of slots. It's one of the reasons I brought back the Summer Special, to give us more opportunities to try out new artists."

Above: Pat Mills and John Wagner originally conceived Judge Dredd as a "Dirty Harry" figure in the near future. Artist Carlos Ezquerra drew a more futuristic setting, and that simple change opened the door to a world that successive creators have relished exploring and playing in.

For writers, the way in is to submit a script for *Future Shocks*, the comic's long-running series of four-page stories. But with nearly 40 years of twist-endings supplied by such luminaries as Alan Moore, Grant Morrison and Neil Gaiman, are there any *Future Shocks* left to have? Smith says he sees the same >

stories over and over again, a large number of submissions featuring time machines or characters waking up to find themselves in virtual reality prisons. "A good *Future Shock* is built around the twist ending," Smith explains, "but I'll let a mediocre twist through if there's a good grasp of character and dialogue. Being able to tell a strong, interesting story in four pages is a tough hurdle for any writers, but a brilliant training ground."

Above: Thanks to office politics and creative hiccups, Judge Dredd did not appear until Prog 2, drawn by Mike McMahon and not Carlos Ezquerra, his original designer. Ezquerra has returned to the character many times, however, and helped make Dredd as popular as he remains

Opposite: Preview images from *Brink* by Abnett and Culbard.

It's a challenge that many of today's rising stars faced, including Simon Spurrier (*X-Men, The Spire*) and Al Ewing (*Zombo, Loki: Agents of Asgard*). "Simon came through the *Future Shock* system," Smith recalls. "He won our first PitchFest at Dreddcon in 2001, but had been pitching a lot of *Future Shocks* and receiving as many rejections. That didn't stop him. He kept coming back and plugging away." Rob Williams, on the other hand, is a rare case of a writer that managed to bypass the *Future Shock* completely. "He had *Cla$$ War* coming out with Com-X and pitched a story called *Asylum* just as I became editor."

FUTURE THRILLS

As *2000 AD* races towards its 40th anniversary, what can we expect from the Galaxy's Greatest Comic in 2016? "Spring will bring a huge Dredd story that crosses over to the *Megazine* to deal with the repercussions of everything that's been happening the last few years. Then there's *Brink*, a new science fiction series by Dan Abnett and I.N.J. Culbard. The elevator pitch is '*True Detective* in space', with two detectives investigating a

THARG SPEAK

Over the years, *2000 AD* has featured its own language, mostly uttered by Tharg himself. For Nonscrots everywhere, here's a handy list.

BORAG THUNGG, EARTHLET
Greetings, human

NONSCROT
Someone who doesn't read 2000 AD

PROG
Issue

QUAEQUAM BLAG
Good heavens!

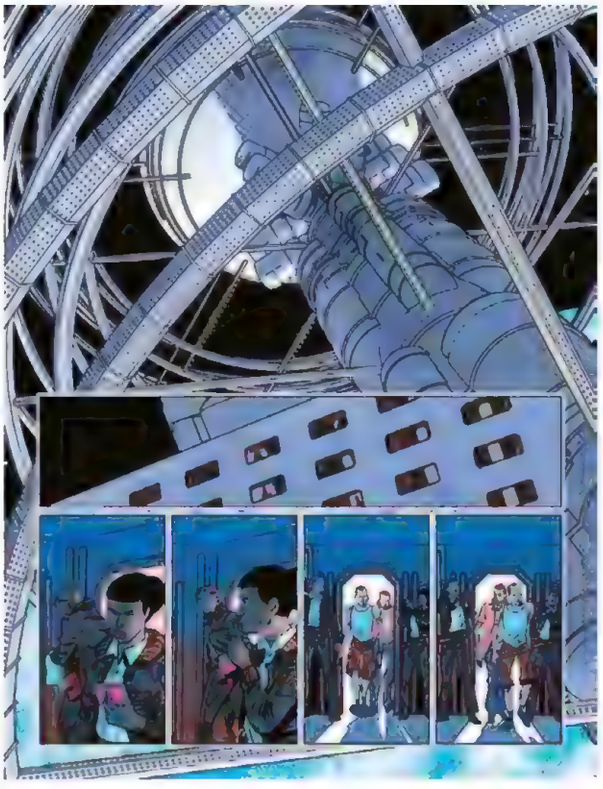
RIGELIAN HOTSHOT
A dreaded form of punishment

SCROTNIG
Good

SPLUNDIG VUR THRIGG
Farewell!

SQUAXX DEK THARGO
A friend of Tharg, a loyal reader

ZARJAZ
Excellent



series of murders linked to a Lovecraftian cult."

Whatever the future might hold, *2000 AD* already exists in a world very different from the one that it inhabited when it launched. The only science-fiction anthology left on the newsstand, it now caters for a more mature audience with more complex stories. "We aim for late teens, but there hasn't been a conscious decision to raise the age of the readership," Smith insists. "It's been a natural progression from before I joined. During the 1990s, our writers and artists were itching to break free of the restrictions that come with an eight-year-old audience. *Sláine* "The Horned God" was *2000 AD's* watershed moment. Comics were no longer seen as disposable. Now they were an art form."

But why has *2000 AD* survived while its competitors floundered? "The comic has always had a firm sense of its own identity," Smith concludes. "A lot of anthologies that were launched before and after *2000 AD* were a bit of a mishmash, but you know when you're reading a *2000 AD* story. Brendan McCarthy summed it up on a podcast when he called *2000 AD* a post-atomic comic. It was launched in the height of the Cold War when people were living in fear of nuclear war. *2000 AD* plugged into that fear of the future and still does. The fears have changed – we're now more afraid of terrorist attack or pandemic – but *2000 AD* is still here, delivering hard-hitting and action-packed stories with more than a little irreverence. A solid hit of Thrill Power every week!"

As she did in the case of Lieutenant Roman Bagreev, who in 2000 was serving in the 160th tank regiment under the command of Yuri Budanov, the colonel accused of raping, torturing, and killing the young Elza Visaevna Kungayeva.
COLONEL BUDANOV CALLED FOR BAGREEV TO STAND GUARD WHILE HE AND CAPTAIN IVAN FEDOROV, DRUNK, DECIDED TO ENTERTAIN THEMSELVES BY RANDOMLY OPENING FIRE ON A VILLAGE
LOOK AT 'EM RUN!
LITTLE SHITS
But Bagreev refused to fire, and saved a dozen lives. Anna was informed of this and looked into the case.
TATAT
GOT HIM!
PAM
I'M AHEAD, COLONEL
PAM

WORLD OF Comics

IGORT
A UNIQUE VISION

Igort is one of the most distinctive voices and also one of the most influential figures in Italian comics since the 1970s. ***Paul Gravett*** looks at his career and the forthcoming new edition of one of his masterworks

Igort is the pseudonym of Igor Tuveri, born in Cagliari, Sardinia, in 1958. "From my first name, Igor, I have always felt a link with Russian culture. My father was a composer and I grew up surrounded by Russian music as well as the great Russian novels." At the age of 20, he left home for the cultural epicentre of Bologna, where he made his debut as an illustrator, musician, essayist, radio presenter and author of comics. His first stories appeared in 1978 in Italy's pioneering fumetti magazine for adults, *Linus*.

The following year, Igort joined his friends Daniele Brolli, Roberto Baldazzini and one other to buy a printing press to self-publish their own magazine, *Il Pinguino Guadalupa*. Igort drew the first cover as a homage to Charles Biro's lurid pre-Code American crime comic book *Crime Does Not Pay*. Other emerging creators would also contribute, notably Giorgio Carpinteri and Lorenzo Mattotti. Revolution was in the air in the Italian fumetti tradition in 1982, as the post-punk New Wave generation of Igort and his peers formed the artists' collective Valvoline, named after the brand of motor oil to suggest dynamism. Igort was not alone among them in taking inspiration as much from so-called serious art and culture as supposedly low-brow popular entertainment.

From January 1983, Igort and cohorts introduced *Valvoline Motorcomics* as a supplement in *Linus* spinoff *Alter Linus*. Despite the diversity of their styles, including the ambient photographic washes of Marcello Jori and the crazed cartoonish pop art of Massimo Mattioli, Valvoline were united by their goal to explore new forms of narrative with total freedom. Daniele Brolli enthused about "the ease with which they moved between different languages". Igort summed up their credo: "Rather than breaking the limits of comics, we believe that comics have even greater limits on them than those which enclose them." *Goodbye baobab*, Igort's first extensive story about a sumo wrestler and the Yakuza, developed here and foreshadowed another great love of his life, Japan.

ALL IMAGES © IGORT TRANSLATION BY JAMIE RICHARDS. PUBLISHED BY SIMON & SCHUSTER

At night the older kids would go out with my father to hunt for hares or rabbits or hedgehogs. Anything to eat.
There weren't many hedgehogs anymore; they'd been disappearing from the area for years.
We even ate snakes; anything...
But usually my father and brothers didn't find much, just roots.
Dug up with sweat out of the ice and snow.
And brought home like holy relics...

COMRADE PRESIDENT YURI VLADIMIROVICH ANDROPOV... HAS PASSED AWAY THE COUNTRY IS IN MOURNING THE STATE FUNERAL WILL BE HELD
The years went by...
The comrade presidents changed...
I kept getting worse...

> "In May 1991 Igort made his first trip to Japan, a dream ever since he started drawing"

Too experimental for many readers, the supplement was dropped after seven issues, but it resumed in 1984 in the more radical counterculture glossy *Frigidaire* as *Valvorama*. The group was soon joined by American Charles Burns, resident in Rome when his wife's job took them there. Through this exposure, opportunities opened up for Igort, alongside others, to apply and expand his talents across many media – fashion, television, journalism, visual arts and music. In 1985 Igort with two friends formed the Slava Trudu Orchestra, named after the Russian newspaper whose name means "Glory to Labour". Their first album of Darkwave electronic pop, suitably titled *Mélodico Moscovita*, has a Cossack-inspired cover by Igort.

Publishing comics is as much in Igort's blood as writing and drawing them. He went on to co-found other magazines, notably the 64-page *Dolce Vita* in 1987, a showcase for comics, articles, fiction and reviews, which ran for 23 issues. Out of this period came two fully-painted stories, adults-only mash-ups of elegant decadence with gutsy pulp culture compiled into *Dulled Feelings* in 1990, his first major work translated into English.

Above: After two years living and travelling in Ukraine and Russia, Igort published his *Ukrainian Notebooks*, subtitled "un récit-témoignage" – "graphic testimony" recounting what he himself had observed and real-life stories of the forgotten holocaust in Ukraine

JAPAN AND RUSSIA

In the first story, against the backdrop of the Cold War, a Japanese man is torn between two lovers, a male secret agent and a female spy. Igort combines ultra-modernist clothes, decors, vehicles and architecture with references to Italian Futurist paintings and the occasional explicit shunga or Japanese erotic print from the past.

The second story gave Igort the chance to pay homage to Batman, a childhood obsession. American crimefighter Night Creature is posted in Moscow. The father of Aaran Krilenko, a Russian Jewish teenage boy, asks the superhero to instruct his son, whom he has forced to do weight-training from the day he was born and who has therefore developed into a muscular prodigy but at the expense of his intellect. Night Creature accepts

My father hadn't received a real education, he couldn't read or write.
?
But still my parents were very scrupulous with the upbringing of us kids, and they sent us to school every day.
I remember my childhood very well.
I was between seven and eight when the terrible famine hit.

At nightfall
She was taken to the edge of
Anna remembers: "In the pitch darkness, I felt something hard, metallic..."
"... with an unfamiliar shape."
"A hellish rocket began, and I realized, from the unmistakable whistle of missiles, that my back was against a Grad multiple rocket launcher"

and adopts the boy, training him as his successor when he has to return to the West. Throw in some three-way sex with treacherous KGB femmes fatales and you have one of most unexpected unofficial takes on Batman – not least because whenever he is in costume, nothing can disguise the large, traditionally missing bulge between his legs.

The '90s brought new ventures. Igort ran another magazine, *Fuego*, presenting his comics alongside those by up-and-coming graduates of the Zio Feininger comics school, all set in the same imaginary city. Launched in February 1990, it ran for six issues. The first issue came with a free vinyl single by Igort's next New Wave band, Los Tres Caballeros. He collaborated with other musicians like Yello and Ryuichi Sakamoto and with labels like Alchemy, Alessi, Memphis and Swatch, while in 1994 he exhibited as a visual artist and musician at the Venice Biennale.

In May 1991 Igort made his first trip to Japan, a dream ever since he started drawing. A month earlier, he had met a representative of Kodansha, one of the three biggest manga publishers, at the Bologna Children's Book Fair, and suggested that it would be good for them to explore collaborations between Japanese and European creators. Inadvertently, he had stumbled on Kodansha's secret plan to initiate such projects, starting with an eventually unrealised team-up between Katsuhiro Otomo and Alejandro Jodorowsky. Igort was invited over by Kodansha, and this visit would lead three years later to his winning a Kodansha Fellowship and the chance to live in Tokyo in 1994 for six months and work with an editor on originating manga for *Morning*, an anthology for men which at the time sold 1.4 million copies a week.

Above: Much as the title would suggest, Igort's *Notebooks* include a diversity of styles and forms – his deceptively simple but heartfelt strip art, pages of text notes, even affectionate portraits of real people whose moving stories he relates without a trace of sensationalism

Igort shares his Japanese experiences in his most recent graphic novel, *Quaderni Giaponesi* ("Japanese Notebooks", 2015), yet to be translated into English. He shows pages from his first attempt, *Amore* ("Love"), a consciously cinematic, exaggerated and brutal Mafia thriller set in Sicily. In sublime contrast, his follow-up starred the first extremely kawaii or cute baby in space named Yuri, a nod to cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin.

JAPANESE EXPERIENCES

Two seasons of *Yuri* eight-pagers appeared in full colour in *Morning*, which was otherwise mostly mono, and Igort discovered that readers loved the character: "Around 400 letters arrived from readers with advice and declarations of affection for Yuri." He also records the gruelling ten days, over the course of two weeks, when day after day he had to deliver roughs for another 16-page story, and the disappointment of being told by his editor that they could not run more *Yuri* in black-and-white because the readers really wanted its bright colours but *Morning* was reduced to only eight pages of colour. *Quaderni Giaponesi* is about

In Beslan, between the first and third of September 2004, a group of thirty-two Chechen militants seized a school, taking about 1200 hostages, including both children and adults.
Anna jumps on the first plane.
CARRY-ON
AISLE
OKAY
But on the flight she asks for tea, and immediately starts to feel sick.
MA AM?
MA AM?
IS THERE A DOCTOR ON BOARD?
She'd been porsoned.

much more than manga – it's more akin to a personal journal, scrapbook, memoir and meditation about this extraordinary culture.

While in Tokyo in 1997, Igort developed an earlier idea into what would become his most widely translated and awarded graphic novel, *5 Is The Perfect Number*. Initially serialised in three comic books from Daniele Brolli's Phoenix Press, it appeared in its final form in 2002 from Coconino Press, a new publishing house co-founded by Igort in 2000 which would revolutionise the graphic novel in Italy. The book follows the path of vengeance of Peppino, an ageing, old-fashioned Mafioso whose son's murder forces him out of retirement. Betrayed by his own gang, Peppino learns that rules and loyalties no longer apply. The period and mood are captured in Igort's refined linework, enhanced with a petrol-blue second tone and

Above: Igort has always felt drawn to Russia because of his Russian heritage, but there's no hint of favouritism in his harrowing accounts of repression and brutality in the *Notebooks*.

subtleties learnt from his manga experience and his appreciation of Japanese cinema. He is currently developing a movie adaptation of it.

Next, Igort collaborated in 2004 to 2005 with Argentinian writer Carlos Sampayo on the life story of jazz genius Fats Waller, including his role in the Harlem scene in the '30s and his meteoric career, cut short at the age of 39. Richly documented with historical background, this two-part, 136-page graphic biography was hailed in 2006 at the Naples Comics Festival as the best comic of the year.

Igort returned to noir in a new book-format anthology he founded in 2004 called *Black*, published in both French and Italian, as were the *Ignatz* collection of large comics books, which included Igort's return to Japanese characters and settings in his ongoing series *Baobab*. As he says of Japan, "The mystery, trip after trip, remains intact – indeed, is renewed. I know more and know less."

But it was Russia, then and now, that became the main focus of his attention. Igort's original intention for his trip to Russia in 2008 was to research a biography of author and playwright Anton Chekov. To reach Crimea, he had to go via Kiev, but once there he was overcome by a feeling in its people of dignity with deep misery. "It was a shock and I couldn't understand what was happening. I told my publishers I wanted to do a different book. I moved in and in total spent almost two years there between the Ukraine, Russia and Siberia." Two exceptional, harrowing works grew from this immersive period: *The Ukrainian Notebooks* (2010) and *The Russian Notebooks* (2011), both being released in March in one volume in English by Simon & Schuster, subtitled "Life and Death Under Soviet Rule".

The first work unlocks the darkest of memories, from first-hand witnesses and survivors of Stalin's government-sanctioned famine of 1932. This is estimated to have killed between 1.8 and 12 million ethnic Ukrainians, a buried holocaust that is largely overlooked in the West. Igort does not intrude himself and his opinions but instead steps back and finally gives these unheard victims a voice. "Drawings can reveal their humble, hidden lives and illuminate the shadowy areas which probably the written word cannot tell."

GRAPHIC TESTIMONY

In *The Russian Notebooks* Igort deals with the life and death of the journalist and human rights activist Anna Politkovskaya. "Her assassination took place on the very day I arrived in Moscow. Stanislav Markelov, lawyer for the Chechen cause and Anna's friend, was killed by a bullet to the head; Anastasia Baburova too, five minutes by foot from the Kremlin. The killer calmly walked away and then he took the subway. Unpunished. I am trying to convey this terrifying presence of silence which envelops present-day Russia." In Igort's sensitive hands, this almost new genre of "graphic testimony" proves once more the power of comics to generate both understanding and empathy.

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COMICS WE RATE

The next 12 pages are crammed to the gills with reviews of the latest comics and graphic novels...

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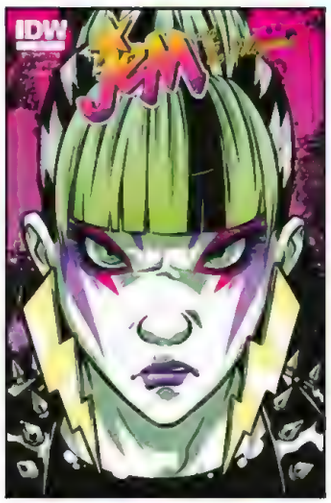


Huck

Reviewed: Issues 1-2
Writer: Mark Millar
Artist: Rafael Albuquerque
Publisher: Image
Format: 6-issue series

★★★★½

Mark Millar is the king of comic-controversy. The titles he's best known for – *Kick-Ass*, *Wanted*, *The Secret Service*, et al – are violent, sweary affairs. That's not to say these aren't good books. On his best days Millar is a hell of a writer and he gets great artists, but his work isn't for everyone. *Huck*, however, very much *is*...

Inspired by the notoriously doomy ending to *Man Of Steel* (which – spoilers ahead for the three of you who haven't seen it – culminates with Superman snapping Zod's neck), Millar decided to create something upbeat and positive to counteract the sour taste left in his mouth.

Huck is a mystery. He lives in an American town where everybody knows his name and everybody loves him. His mantra is simple: do a good deed every day. Sometimes those deeds are small: he buys everyone in the line behind him at a burger bar lunch, or mows the lawns of the town's elderly residents. Others, however, are very big...

It's a simple, sweet premise – *Forrest Gump* meets Captain America, as Millar himself has described it. And yet it takes place in a world that's not too far removed from our own. In the first issue's key scene Huck rescues a class of kidnapped children from Boko Haram militants. That moment is weird and jarring and not entirely successful. It's clearly based on the real-life kidnapping of over 200 children in May 2014, and the positioning of an actual tragedy in a Capra-esque comic book skirts poor taste. And yet, it's handled with such tenderness that it's easy to be won over by the melancholy fantasy of the moment. "I brought some candy to cheer everyone up," says Huck to the frightened children. If only life were that simple, eh?

"IT'S A SWEET, SIMPLE PREMISE: FORREST GUMP MEETS CAPTAIN AMERICA"

The second issue sketches in a background for the character, establishing that his incredible abilities *are* powers (in #1 it's ambiguous) while giving a better sense of the world that this uncommonly kind hero inhabits.

Rafael Albuquerque's art is superb throughout and couldn't be more unlike his work on *American Vampire*. It has a lovely retro '50s feel, aided by Dave McCaig's rich, inky colours. As the first issue opens, we see Huck riding atop a pickup truck before jumping bonnet-to-bonnet on his way to dive into an azure blue ocean, and it's just breathtaking. It's clear that Albuquerque wants to make you feel every moment of this journey, and his work reminds you that super-books can offer visceral thrills without resorting to bloodshed. His pairing with Millar has resulted in one of the most intriguing super-books in quite some time. **Will Salmon**

Dark Knight III: The Master Race

Reviewed: Issue 1
Writers: Frank Miller, Brian Azzarello
Artists: Andy Kubert, Klaus Janson
Publisher: DC
Format: 3-part series

★★★★

***The Dark Knight Returns* is a serious contendor for the greatest graphic novel ever, and it's certainly an influence on every person to work on Batman since.** Follow-up *The Dark Knight Strikes Again* disappointed, but it does have its fans – including Grant Morrison. Now Miller's back, with Brian Azzarello, for one of the most hyped comics of the year. Can *The Master Race* live up to expectation?

On the evidence here in #1: potentially. Kubert and Janson's art is quite perfect, stylistically homaging the original through fresh eyes. As for the plot…

When the title was announced, some readers shuddered like they were hugging Mr Freeze. Anyone who's read *Holy Terror* (an anti-Muslim book that almost starred Batman) will attest that Miller's hardline politics and race issues aren't necessarily a good combination. But, despite the joint writing credit, it's pretty clear that Azzarello (so street-level humanist in *100 Bullets*) controls this issue's ideas, opening with Batman brutalising GCPD officers threatening an unarmed black teenager. In a #BlackLivesMatter world, it's startling, locating *Master Race* dead centre of the Zeitgeist.

In fact, the book seems almost entirely constructed to defy reader expectations, with several surprises scattered throughout and four absolutely huge cliffhangers. One of the most exciting involves Wonder Woman, with Azzarello demonstrating the masterful control of Diana last seen during his perfect run on her solo book.

It's all recognisably located within the universe of *Returns*, with newscaster narration (including Bill O'Reilly and Jon Stewart) setting satirical context. If the pay-off turns out as good as the set-up, this could be another classic. **Sam Ashurst**

Not the Miller of *Sin City*, at any rate...

New book, new armour. Naturally

Invincible Iron Man

Reviewed Issue 1–3
Writer: Brian Michael Bendis
Artist: David Marquez
Publisher: Marvel
Format: Ongoing

★★★★

***Secret Wars* may not be finished, but that hasn't stopped Marvel from releasing a bunch of new books post-Doomverse.** *Invincible Iron Man* sees Brian Michael Bendis and David Marquez give Tony Stark a brand new outlook following the slightly disappointing *Superior* series. Out goes "evil" Stark and scuffles with Daredevil, and in comes in a lot of the bright optimism that made the Bendis-Marquez run on Miles Morales Spider-Man fun.

We have a new suit, a new team-up and a revived villain in the opening arc. Bendis does a great job to make *Invincible* a good jumping-on point for new fans to the book, so while Tony may be reeling from the news he's adopted from the previous *Invincible* arc, it plays as background noise in story that sees our favourite billionaire chasing down ex-lover Madame Masque and bumping into a big player from *Secret Wars* (this also features a nice nod to an old Alan Moore joke). With a new AI in Friday and a new love interest in Dr Amara Perera, Bendis writes smart by having Tony outsmarted and outsassed at every turn.

It's not an especially new spin to have Iron Man start a book with a new suit and a desire to save the world, but between the top-notch Bendis banter and clean artwork from Marquez, this is a post *Secret Wars* book well worth picking up. And that's not even considering the amazing superhero high five that closes out #3... **Carl Anka**

Jem & The Holograms

Reviewed: Issues 1–9
Writer: Kelly Thompson
Artist: Sophie Campbell
Publisher: IDW
Format: Ongoing

★★★★★

This is an inspired re-imagining of the 1980s cartoon about rival all-female rock bands. At its heart the story is about the Holograms' friendship, the bond between the main characters driving the story and making for a startling contrast to the Misfits, the villains of the piece, who are prone to infighting and sabotage.

It's Sophie Campbell's artwork that really brings this book to life, and the thing that stands out is the diversity of the characters – their body shapes, skin colour and sexuality are as vibrant and varied as the crazy outfits they all wear. There's a sweet romantic relationship that develops between two female characters, and Campbell's joyful artwork captures the initial pangs of excitement and lust in a new relationship perfectly.

The original cartoon's main features were the songs and music videos, and their feel has been well captured on the page. With the words snaking around the artwork and the pages full of dense, electric imagery that really captures the essence of a live show or music video, the pages almost move.

If, somewhere, you still harbour your childhood dreams of becoming a rock star, this book's energy will capture you in its adult rendition of a childlike wonder. **Sara Westrop**

James Bond 007 VARGR

Reviewed: Issues 1-2
Writer: Warren Ellis
Artist: Jason Masters
Publisher: Dynamite
Format: Ongoing

★★★★☆

The Bond movies exist in a perpetual state of to and fro between the "back to Fleming" realism of the Daniel Craig *Casino Royale* and the invisible cars and face-swapping of *Die Another Day*.

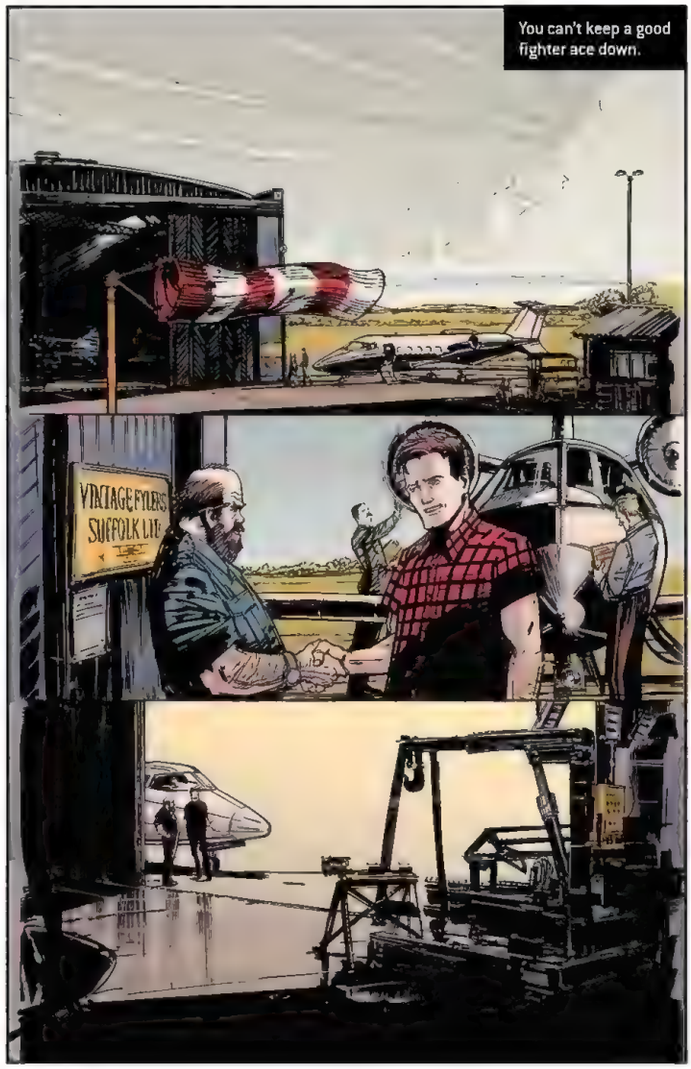
The new 007 book by Warren Ellis and Jason Masters is an entirely separate entity, of course. They can't reference the films, and their cast of characters look very different to their screen incarnations, but "VARGR" comfortably strikes a balance between the two extremes, with a reasonably believable story enhanced with touches of the fantastic and flamboyant.

We meet 007 on the job, chasing a henchman through the snow-bound streets of Helsinki, seeking revenge for the murder of another 00 agent. It's the start of a case that involves a cocaine ring, an assassin going under the name of non more *Bond* name of Dharma Reach and a cybernetics lab. The inclusion of this post-human technology is very Ellis, but remains plausible.

Masters draws James with elegant poise and a sly smirk. Visually based on Hoagy Carmichael, he's physically imposing, yet graceful, while Ellis' script goes out of its way to humanise him. This Bond has friends and colleagues. The character can sometimes come across as an overbearing prick, but here you understand why people fall for his charms.

Masters' art is polished and slick throughout, with an almost Pop Art feel to the early scenes. #2 is more clinical as we travel to a sinister lab, but look at the grace with which he handles the tumbling chaos of a car crash.

Offering an exciting new take on an old formula, this is a striking and confident addition to the Bond myth that should appeal to Fleming purists as well as the *SPECTRE* audience. **Will Salmon**



HIS R.A.F. TRAINING ENDED WHEN HE STRUCK AN OFFICER. ALL HE WANTED WAS TO FIGHT THE NAZIS -ALL HE GOT WAS A JOB AS GALLEY RAT, ABOARD THE EMPIRE CAFE.
THE VESSEL WAS BOMBED, THE HURRICAT'S PILOT KILLED BY SHRAPNEL. HE TOOK THE DEAD MAN'S FLYING GEAR, AND IN THE CHAOS CLIMBED ABOARD THE AIRCRAFT.

Johnny Red

Reviewed: Issues 1-2
Writer: Garth Ennis
Artist: Keith Burns
Publisher: Titan
Format: 8-part series

★★★★

Johnny Red was born in battle – or, rather, *Battle*. The WWII fighter ace made his debut in the pages of the quintessential British war comic in 1977.

In this loving reimagining, a dotcom billionaire and aircraft enthusiast has spent $4.5 million on the knackered remains of a Hawker Hurricane Mk1. He wants to find out more about his purchase and the pilot who flew it in WWII, so travels to Russia to meet a man who claims to have been the chief mechanic in the squadron it flew in. We then flash back to the living hell of Stalingrad and are introduced to Johnny Redburn, a dislocated Englishman who is fighting the Nazis the only way he can – by flying with a Russian squadron.

In the debut issue, writer Garth Ennis subverts all expectations from the start. We don't actually see the title character until the final panel. And while a book like this stands or falls on the strength of its aerial combat sequences, Ennis takes a good amount of time setting the scene before allowing us the first frantic glimpse of battle.

When it comes, though, it's magnificent. Burns draws wonderfully kinetic dogfights with grace and drama. He's a member of the Guild of Aviation Artists, and it shows in his beautiful, elegant aircraft far more than his distinctive but oddly angular humans.

#2 delves deeper into Johnny's origins, particularly in a stunning splash page where a desperate Redburn makes his escape from a burning ship in a stolen plane. We also learn more about the crew who will become his mates: fiery fellow-pilot Yakob, nervous young Popovitch and his lover, Petrova. Although there are a lot of characters introduced, each of them feels distinct and this makes for a tight, economically told origin story. The only real misfire here is the slightly limp cliffhanger to #2, where it's revealed that Johnny will be separated from his crew – given that we've only just met them, it's hard to care too much.

Still, this is Ennis and Burns on thrilling form. *Johnny Red* works precisely because it doesn't tinker with the perennial WWII adventure formula too much. It's a grittier, more modern rendition, perhaps, but the same winning template is firmly in place. Chocks away, chaps! **Will Salmon**

"WE DON'T ACTUALLY SEE THE TITLE CHARACTER UNTIL THE FINAL PANEL OF #1"

I HADN'T QUITE ANTICIPATED YOU'D LAND US IN THE MIDDLE OF A WAR ZONE
WHAT ABOUT THE GALAXY? WILL THEY BE OKAY?
LOOK AT YOU. EVEN NOW, YOU'RE WORRYING ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE
I JUST WANT TO MAKE SURE IT WAS WORTHWHILE. THAT IT MEANT SOMETHING.
This is a Doctor you'll warm to...

Doctor Who
THE 8TH DOCTOR

Reviewed: Issues 1–2
Writer: George Mann
Artist: Emma Vieceli
Publisher: Titan Comics
Format: 5-part series

★★★★

For a Doctor who has only appeared on TV twice, the Eighth Doctor has had quite the afterlife. The character has lived on in novels and *Doctor Who Magazine* comics, and Paul McGann has leant his silky tones to more than 72 new audio adventures for Big Finish. But that was the *old* Eighth Doctor.

The man we meet in Titan's new miniseries is the Eighth of "Night Of The Doctor". The Time War is raging throughout the universe and it's only a matter of time before our man of peace is sucked into it...

We start at the Doctor's house on Earth, where he finds a squatter: pastel-haired artist Josie Day. It's not long before the aliens she has been painting come to life and rampage through the village. With that problem eventually resolved, the Doctor takes Josie on a trip of the universe, immediately stumbling into a planet-wide war.

Mann writes a good Doctor, full of a love of life, but with the shadow of conflict hanging over him. Vieceli, meanwhile, draws Doctor Eight as a dashing, romantic Byronic figure. Visually, the book is a joy.

The plots are, so far, all one-and-done single-issue adventures, and it'd be nice to see this team tackle a more complex, multi-part tale. That said, while the 11th Doctor series embarks on a sprawling year-long arc, it's good that Titan are catering to more casual readers too. **Will Salmon**

Filmish

Writer: Edward Ross
Artist: Edward Ross
Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Format: Graphic novel

★★★★

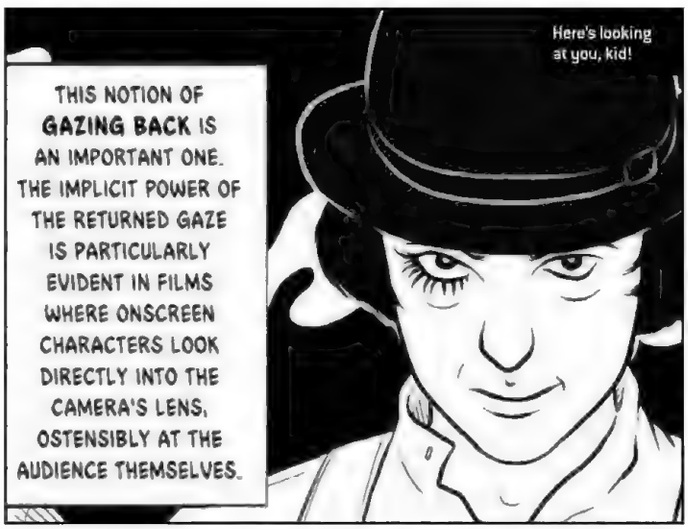
There's a slight cloud hanging over Edward Ross's *Filmish*. Scott McCloud. This won't be the only review to point out that this book owes a lot to McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, in both form and aesthetic.

Filmish features a cartoon version of Ross presenting a kind of illustrated lecture on seven aspects of film theory, including notions about Sets and Architecture; Voice and Language; and Power and Ideology. That he's taking on the McCloud idiom is, in fact, no bad thing – it's not as if the comics world is currently overwhelmed by first-person critical discourses on aspects of culture… although you'd do well to also look out Jessica Abel's superb *Out On The Wire* (Broadway Books), which, counter-intuitively, uses the graphic novel form to talk about radio journalism.

Ross is a likeable host, former film student and all-round cinephile, who, when not discussing one movie in particular, packs vistas out with all manner of references – metaphorical "Hello to Jason Isaacs…" abound. But although the book is beautifully constructed and drawn, you could argue that he doesn't take full advantage of the comic form. There's no true storytelling per se, no real progression between panels, most of which stand alone except for the continuing thread of his narration.

And yet, it works. It's that valuable thing: an easy read taking on complicated ideas, with the chapter on Power and Ideology proving the most thought provoking. Not only does it reveal how the US military manages to control the film industry, it also contains the ironic revelation that the CIA's American Committee For Cultural Freedom interceded to ensure the 1956 adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* represented Big Brother as a Communist.

"*Filmish* will return…" writes Ross. A sequel to look forward to. **Graham Kibble-White**


THIS NOTION OF GAZING BACK IS AN IMPORTANT ONE. THE IMPLICIT POWER OF THE RETURNED GAZE IS PARTICULARLY EVIDENT IN FILMS WHERE ONSCREEN CHARACTERS LOOK DIRECTLY INTO THE CAMERA'S LENS, OSTENSIBLY AT THE AUDIENCE THEMSELVES.
Here's looking at you, kid!

Phonogram

Reviewed: Issues 1-4
Writer: Kieron Gillen
Artist: Jamie McKelvie
Publisher: Image
Format: 6-part series

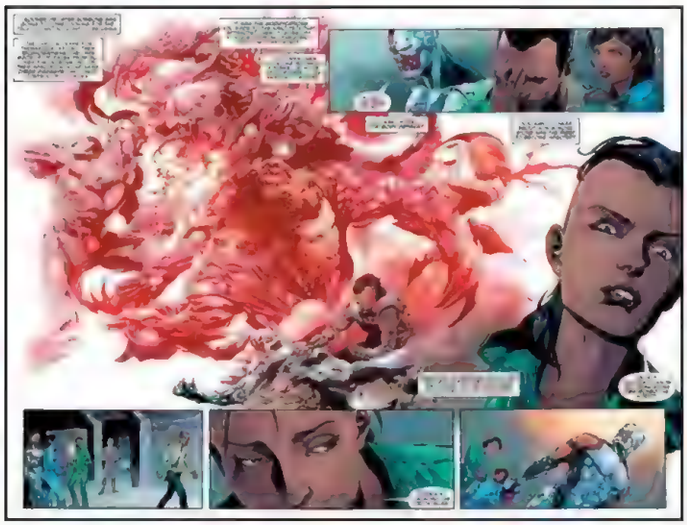
★★★★★

Third albums can be a bit tricky as a band either fail to replicate the fire and energy of their earlier work or believe their own hype and cross the line into self-indulgent bombast.

It's probably *de rigueur*, then, for any self-respecting indie kid to steel themselves to hate Kieron Gillen and Jamie McKelvie's third run of *Phonogram*. It's understandable. "Rue Britannia" in 2006 felt like it came from nowhere – a US comic that was thrillingly, uncompromisingly British, a monochrome game-changer. Gillen and McKelvie have since achieved success. Five years after second volume, "The Singles Club" concluded, do they still have that nebulous "it"?

"The Immaterial Girl" follows Emily Aster, always one of the most interesting cast members. Here we find she has traded half her personality for the power that makes her a major player in the *Phonogram* world, where music is magic and "phonomancers" weave its riffs and licks. But her other half is back, trapping Emily in a 2D world of pop videos, giving Gillen and McKelvie a lot of fun playing with classic promos such as A-Ha's "Take On Me" and making some points on image and imagery.

And it's brilliant. *Phonogram* remains fun and relevant and gloriously elitist – it doesn't care whether you get it or not. As third outings go, it's thankfully more *Parklife* than *Be Here Now*. The fire still burns and the magic still shines. **David Barnett**



Has the former Teen Titan come of age?
YOU BECAME OBSESSED—CONVINCED THAT YOU HAD FOUND THE WAY TO IMPROVE HUMAN LIFE—TO PROLONG IT
"MAYBE THAT WAS THE INTENTION OF WHOEVER CREATED THE NANO TECH IN THE FIRST PLACE. MAYBE SOME SCIENTIST ON ANOTHER PLANET WAS ALSO TRYING TO MAKE LIFE BETTER."

Cyborg

Reviewed: Issues 1-4
Writer: David F. Walker
Artist: Ivan Reis, Eduardo Pansica
Publisher: DC
Format: Ongoing

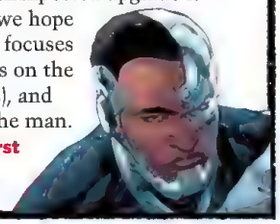
★★

Even if you ignore 30 years of pre-New 52 continuity, it's taken Cyborg a long time to headline his own book. When *Justice League* rebooted in 2011, it felt like only a matter of months before we'd see new member Vic Stone heading up his own #1. Now, four years later, was it worth the wait? Initially, yes.

It starts strongly, with the opening two issues taking an admirable slow-burn approach to locating Cyborg's soul. Bringing new insight to Stone's daddy issues via a strong internal voice and some sly plot-shifts, the tale really conveys a sense of the freak-show celebrity element of being a world-renowned superhero who hangs out with Batman and Aquaman.

Sadly, when #3 kicks in, the book transforms from a relatively sensitive character study into a robot alien invasion action epic and instantly becomes less interesting. It feels like we've read this plot so many times since DC relaunched, most recently in *Futures End* – and it doesn't help matters that Ivan Reis and Eduardo Pansica's visuals get looser and scrappier with every issue. Tonally it's all over the place, veering from super serious to silly, to scary, to soap opera.

There's still hope – a subplot about an unexpected upgrade is fun – but we hope the future focuses a little less on the machine(s), and more on the man. **Sam Ashurst**



Captain America

Reviewed: Issues 1-3
Writer: Nick Spencer
Art: Dan Acuna
Publisher: Marvel
Format: Ongoing

★★★½

It's a new day for Sam Wilson's Captain America following *Secret Wars*, no longer an agent of SHIELD or the US government. Nick Spencer's take on the Sentinel of Liberty offers a fresh perspective on the importance of Captain America, having him battle xenophobes and bad press along with Hydra and super-powered foes.

Spencer packs the new volume with plenty of real-world tension as Cap decides to wade into political debate and speak out about how America could do more. It's a big risk, and it got a lot of tongues wagging as well as sparking a few online petitions to have Spencer and Acuna removed from the book.

Luckily, Marvel has stuck by the pair and allowed them to cut loose in a fun opening arc. Captain America isn't quite the socialist doom-monger the hype would paint him as, but he does become a werewolf and take on a human armadillo. No, *really*. Your regular Steve Rogers adventure this ain't, as Edward Snowden, Taylor Swift and more get riffed on in a fun study in what it means to be Cap at a time when America is more divided than ever.

Dan Acuna's artwork keeps things big, bright and wonderful – Redwing has never looked better, and with Misty Knight working as Cap's partner, the books have a fun '70s funk vibe.

It's never easy writing a Captain America book, but Spencer and Acuna have created one of the more interesting opening arcs in years. Captain America as a werewolf.... who knew it would work so well? **Carl Anka**

Klaxon

Writer: Si Spencer
Artist: Dix
Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Format: Graphic novel

★★★★

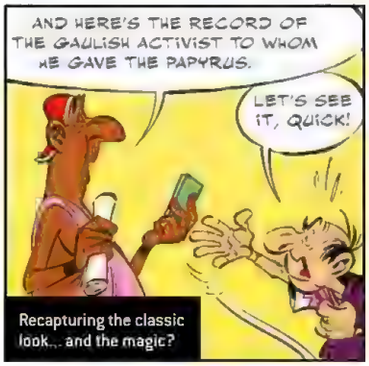
Author Si Spencer has written in the past for *Grange Hill*, *EastEnders* and *The Bill*, but *Klaxon* has nothing in common with any TV soap you've ever seen (well, except possibly for the grim inner-city nihilism of *EastEnders*). This dark, unsettling, hallucinatory graphic novel is more akin to the surrealist films of Buñuel or Dalí.

There is a narrative, but its only logic is that of a dream – or perhaps a bad trip. Carlisle and his two housemates are wasters living a purposeless existence, apparently surviving (and getting high) on eating cavity wall insulation. One day the brutal, grinning Mr Stapleton and his spectral son dump Carole and her distraught mother in the house next door. Moved by compassion and an attraction to Carole, Carlisle offers help... and things get weird.

Symbolic moments and resonant images abound, but they leave you scratching your head. After Carole's mother has a kind of fit (brought on in a sort of ritual by a recording of a klaxon), there's a shower of liquorice allsorts from the ceiling. Carole puts out bottles full of milk, more and more of them, instead of empties. A (porcelain?) pageboy appears on the street, holding an old TV set through which Carlisle sees visions. The doughy, pliable characters – and reality itself – metamorphose and distort in grotesque but sometimes quite comical ways.

Gradually, faced with a nightmarish world of suffering and terrifying unintelligibility, driven by an awakening sense of when people "should not be doing that", Carlisle discovers a kind of purpose and rides his old motorbike into action, and his blundering but heroic self-sacrifice redeems the entire neighbourhood (although there is an ominous coda at the very end).

The art by Dix is expressive and haunting; the muted tones of the grey everyday world are punctuated with telling use of colour. Surreal yet poignant, horrifying yet heartwarming, puzzling yet compelling, *Klaxon* is like no graphic novel you've read before. And I can't get the damn thing out of my head. **Alex Summersby**



Recapturing the classic look... and the magic?

Asterix And The Missing Scroll

Writer: Jean-Yves Ferri
Art: Didier Conrad
Cover: Didier Conrad
Publisher: Orion
Format: Graphic novel

★★★½

The modern phenomenon of WikiLeaks gets the Iron Age treatment. Yes, by Toutatis! The indomitable Gauls return in their 36th canonical volume, a clumsy but endearing satire about truth, data and the historical record. This is the second outing in the series to be created by French duo Ferri and Conrad, who first partnered – to mixed reviews – on 2013's *Asterix And The Picts*.

Although crammed with slapstick banter and colourful battles, Asterix stories have always been at their best when spoofing big public issues. *The Mansions Of The Gods*, the 1971 comedy about property development, and *Obelix And Co*, 1976's dig at capitalism and commercial rivalry, are brilliant social commentaries masquerading as children's books. Alas, *Picts* was a formulaic tale of voyage and adventure. *Scroll*, though, belongs firmly in the tradition of canny lampoonery, and it's all the better for it. The plot is a blatant allegory: Caesar is compiling a history of his wars but censors the truth about how Gaul eludes him. A whistle-blowing scribe smuggles the revealing chapter to crusading journalist Confoundtheirpolitix, who flees Rome and seeks asylum in our heroes' village.

Conrad's art is reminiscent of the classic Uderzo, although for some reason there are lilac unicorns in the forest, a jarring fantasy that reminds us that this pair put Nessie in Picts too. The parody can sometimes feel heavy-handed, with the Romans sending packets of data by messenger pigeons, an almost Terry Pratchett-like conceit. But there's plenty of uplifting wordplay (watch for some familiar seafaring villains experiencing "an early case of pirated information") and there's a sweet nod to original creators Goscinny and Uderzo in the epilogue that will make you forgive any awkwardness. **Dave Bradley**

We're going back! Back to... well, um, the past.

Back To The Future

Reviewed: Issues 1-2
Writer: Bob Gale, John Barber, Erik Burnham
Art: Brent Schnoonover, Dan Schoening
Publisher: IDW
Format: Ongoing

★★★

IDW sensibly brought in Bob Gale, the screenwriter of the *Back To The Future* films, to devise the stories for this series as well as co-writing the scripts. Rather than continue where the third film ends, the series tells stand-alone tales concentrating on the history of Doc Brown.

The first story focuses on how Marty met Doc in the first place – a tricky prospect, as there seemed to be no reason at all why a teenager and a reclusive mad scientist would be friends. The tale rings true for Doc, but relies on Marty being more intellectual and more easily bullied than he ever was in the films.

Much better are the segments that allow Doc to interact with real history, charting his life as a scientist during the Manhattan Project and the Cuban Missile Crisis. These stories have fewer time travel shenanigans, but they fill in the gaps for how Doc got to be so suspicious of interference.

Best of all are the bits that look at Doc in the Old West, raising his children with Clara. Here he's believably more mature and subdued – still a mad scientist, but a more rounded individual, changed for the better by his experiences in the films. They serve as a lovely epilogue for the series. **Abigail Chandler**

Black Magick

Reviewed: Issues 1-2
Writer: Greg Rucka
Artist: Nicola Scott
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing

★★★★

When Image announced *Black Magick*, it was met with excitement from comic book fans – after all, any new Greg Rucka book is worth getting excited about. And not only was this Greg Rucka, it was Greg Rucka back on a police procedural with a twist – something he made into an art form on *Gotham Central*. This time the twist is that cop Rowan Black is also a practising witch.

So it's something of a surprise to read the first two issues and discover that the real star of the show is artist Nicola Scott. She's mostly known for her collaborations with Gail Simone on comics including *Wonder Woman*, *Birds of Prey* and *Secret Six*, but *Black Magick* marks a coming-of-age for her. Her painted pages in 50 shades of grey (and occasional splashes of beautiful colour) are stunning, her characters expressive and varied. It's a truly gorgeous-looking book.

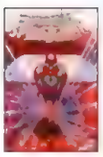
The story, in the first two issues, moves at a leisurely, pace, introducing us to the two worlds that Rowan occupies – the police force, and the murky, ancient world of witchcraft. These collide with a mix of comedy (someone's phone goes off during a naked magic circle) and horror, with a mysterious force coming to take out Rowan's coven.

Black Magick doesn't have quite such elaborate and effective world-building as Rucka's other ongoing series, *Lazarus*, but he and Scott have created a rich, complex and authentic world that promises great things. **Abigail Chandler**

Amazing Spider-Man

Reviewed: Issues 1-3
Writer: Dan Slott
Artist: Giuseppe Camuncoli
Publisher: Marvel

★★★½



Now he's head of his own tech company, it's mo' money, mo' problems for Spidey. As in the "Big Time" arc, Peter Parker tries to make use of his Spidey skills on a grander scale. A double stuffed #1 sets the stall out for the new status quo: with Miles Morales keeping New York safe, Parker can go full on tech entrepreneur. Spider-Man is now his "bodyguard", while his new inventions mean that Parker can keep the world safe both in the suit and out of it.

It's more than a cheap ripoff of *Iron Man*. Writer Dan Slott returns to *Spider-Man* with plenty of the witty webhead banter we've enjoyed from his previous arcs. It's the same old Peter Parker we know and love, he's just battling shareholders as well as super-villains. **Carl Anka**

Mystery Girl

Reviewed: Issue 1
Writer: Paul Tobin
Artist: Alberto J Alburquerque
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: Ongoing

★★½

Trine can solve any puzzle that is put to her. Ask her where your dog's toy has gone and she'll point out the kid who stole it. Grill her about an unsolved crime and she'll instantly know where the gun was tossed. She never leaves her pavement "office", but when a mystery involving some mammoths comes along, she can't resist getting more directly involved.

Alberto J Alburquerque's exaggerated pencils are OK, but tonally the collision of gentle magic realism and sordid gangland violence jars. Still, this is an intriguing enough debut with some zippy dialogue, though it never quite pulls off its London setting – there are too many incidents of "butt" and "sidewalk"! **Will Salmon**

Jughead

Reviewed: Issues 1-2
Writer: Chip Zdarsky
Artist: Erica Henderson
Publisher: Archie Comics
Format: Ongoing

★★★½

As anyone who's read *Sex Criminals* can tell you, artist Chip Zdarsky is a master of laugh-out-loud visual gags. As writer, he brings his quirky humour to this first spinoff from Waid and Staples' retooled *Archie*.

Jughead is Archie's best pal, though they seem to have little in common: Arch is obsessed with chasing girls and playing guitar; Jug is only interested in eating and avoiding schoolwork. The latter hasn't escaped the notice of sinister new principal Mr Stanger, who sets out to bring Jughead down – or at least put him in detention.

Jug's dreaminess gives Zdarsky and Henderson the pretext for some format-breaking interludes: a *Game of Thrones* parody in #1 and an SF spoof in #2. These are fun enough but too long, leaving the main stories feeling undernourished. Henderson's art is also an acquired taste: the angular faces give the book an edgy, sugar-high craziness, but the character design isn't always that appealing. Still, she captures Jug's laconic smile and the weirdness of his world.

All that said, the gags hit home almost every time and this is never less than a tremendously likeable book. It's wilder and weirder than the more relationship-based *Archie*, but continues the reinvention of that series as a credible comic universe with a subversive streak. **Will Salmon**

JUGHEAD, YOU'RE NOT LEAVING UNTIL YOU PAY--
--BUT OF COURSE THIS TASTY TREAT WOULD MEAN NOTHING WITHOUT THE COMPANY OF THE ASTONISHINGLY HANDSOME KEVIN KELLER, WHO--
UGH, FINE! I'LL PAY FOR YOURS!

AS YOU KNOW, I BELIEVE RULES DO NOT APPLY TO ME. SO I'M ALWAYS ON THE LOOKOUT TO CIRCUMVENT THEM.
LIKE HOW YOU SOLD THOSE BURGERS IN THE CAFETERIA LAST WEEK?*
EXACTLY! WHILE I DIDN'T BREAK YOUR PRECIOUS *HUMAN RULES,* I BENT THEM LIKE REGGIE BENDS WHEN HE SPOTS A NICKEL

"CHIP ZDARSKY IS A MASTER OF LAUGH-OUT-LOUD GAGS"

New #1s

Dragon Age: Magekiller
A decent debut for Rucka and Carnero's take on the fantasy franchise. Not just for gamers.

Ringside
Joe Keatinge and Nick Barber head up this pleasingly gritty new wrestling series.

Eighth Seal
John Rock's art excels in this combination of horror and politics from IDW.

The Precinct
A steampunk murder mystery that's thankfully more interesting than it sounds.

Lara Croft And The Frozen Omen

Reviewed: Issue 1-3
Writer: Corina Bechko
Artist: Randy Green
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: 5-part series

★★★

Lara Croft is back, thanks to writer Corinna Bechko and artist Randy Green, and she's brought a familiar face from *The Temple of Osiris* with her: fellow tomb raider Carter Bell.

This time, Lara and Carter are on the trail of mysterious artefacts with the power to control humans, all of which are being brought together by the monstrous Mr Green. The job takes Lara globetrotting through Istanbul, Croatia, Arizona and London, fighting mind-controlled people along with some crocodiles and rock monsters because, well, that's just what Lara Croft does.

This series is aiming for nothing more than mindless fun. Lara is as smart and resourceful as she should be, but the series sheds no new light on her character. She's not particularly tested – in fact, she bounces from one attack to another without ever seeming shaken up, and so, because Lara seems to feel no tension, the reader doesn't either.

There are a few odd artistic choices – Green depicts a British Museum that looks nothing like the real thing, and also shows Lara going to her work in the museum still in her green vest and gun holsters. There's sticking to the iconic look, and there's keeping a character in the same outfit throughout because you're worried that readers won't recognise her otherwise. This is a fun, unchallenging series, packed with a little too much exposition and not quite enough character. Lara and Carter make a good team but don't reach their potential. **Abigail Chandler**

Jupiter's Circle Volume 2

Reviewed: Issue 1
Writer: Mark Millar
Artist: Wilfredo Torres
Publisher: Image
Format: 6-part series

★★½

Whilst we applaud Mark Millar's ability to stretch the spandex to the limits with his high-concept, comics-as-movies, post-modern, post-Moore creations, there's the risk of diminishing returns. The beautifully rendered *Jupiter's Legacy* was great fun, fusing *Spandex's* sexy heroes with *Mad Men's* boozing suits and '50s romance comics, via a Millarworld filter. *Circle* volume 1, though enjoyable enough, was bound to fall in its shadow.

Volume 2 starts with romance in space and keeps the sedate Mills & Boon approach going throughout. There are some nice touches – Sheldon becoming the world's most house-proud husband; Professor Prism turning New York monochrome – but overall this first issue spreads the story thinly. Torres's widescreen, minimal panel approach works fine for action scenes but you feel short-changed for much of the issue, with three or four panels for pages where nothing much happens. Things may improve in #2, but by the end of #1 you'll be reaching for your TPB of *Legacy* and looking to Jupiter's future rather than its past. **Rob Lane**

The Hangman

Reviewed: Issue 1
Writer: Frank Tieri
Artist: Felix Ruiz
Publisher: Archie
Format: Ongoing

★★★★

There's more than a little Batman (not to mention a dash of Spawn) in the Dark Circle line's latest addition. The Hangman goes after criminals with all of Bruce Wayne's zeal and none of his morality. That's made more-or-less acceptable here because the initial villain – hitman Mike – is so one-dimensionally loathsome that you're eagerly waiting for him to be offed. It'll be interesting to see, however, whether future issues poke at the hero's ambiguities more.

Felix Ruiz' gritty, bloody art is suitably shadowy and hugely atmospheric. His rendition of The Hangman's first attack is especially dynamic. There's a slight '90s Vertigo vibe here, which is no bad thing. It's light on plot, but an intriguing start to the series. **Will Salmon**

I AM SALAKAN-SAYAGAW, YOUR PROPHET...
...COME TO ME! WITH MY INFINITE WISDOM, I VOW TO PROTECT YOU...
WHO SAYS YOU'RE OUR PROPHET?! GO! GO AWAY, YOU SENILE OLD FOOL!
Can you love a heartless hero?

Showman Killer: Heartless Hero

Writer: Alejandro Jodorowsky
Artist: Nicolas Fructus
Publisher: Titan
Format: Graphic novel

★★★

Fans of the extensive work of Chilean writer/director/comic-creator and surrealist Alejandro Jorodowsky will be expecting nothing less than an insane cult-classic in the making from his new title. With *Showman Killer* those with a lust for sex-tinged, violent, interplanetary space opera won't be disappointed.

This first volume begins with a long prologue where an evil "sperm collector" extracts seed from the bottom half of the recently bisected convict Joe The Gut Eater before implanting it into a vegetative young woman. Nine months later and Showman Killer is born, an orphan denied of love, his emotional conduits surgically removed, who develops powers as a ruthless, relentless, shape-shifting killing machine, able to transform via the trigger word "show" into pretty much anything from an actual mountain to a multi-limbed, laser-blade-wielding monster.

French artist Nicolas Fructus' panels are tinged with muted beauty, though at times the action is so grandiose that it's confusing, the widespread carnage actually lacking impact because of its sheer extent.

Showman Killer himself isn't the easiest character to relate to, entirely lacking in empathy or loyalty other than to cold hard cash, while the main story sets up a complex tale of political treason, a mystery woman who visits Showman in a dream, and a stolen baby heir. *Heartless Hero* promises much to come but this first volume is heavy on exposition, tantalising but frustrating as a whole. Then there's Showman himself – how the unstoppable, unlovable, destroyer of *anything* can become a true hero, and indeed ever be in any real peril, remains for future episodes to reveal. **Rosie Fletcher**

"AT TIMES THE ACTION IS SO GRANDIOSE, IT'S CONFUSING"

Trades

21ST CENTURY TANK GIRL
She's back and in typically anarchic form. Great, though Hewlett's contributions are few.

ARCHIE
One of last year's most exciting comics (no, really). Seriously, buy it!

STAR WARS CHEWBACCA
One of Marvel's lesser *Wars* books, but Phil Noto's lovely art shines.

CROSSED+100
Alan Moore slows the pace of the survival horror series in a typically fascinating book.

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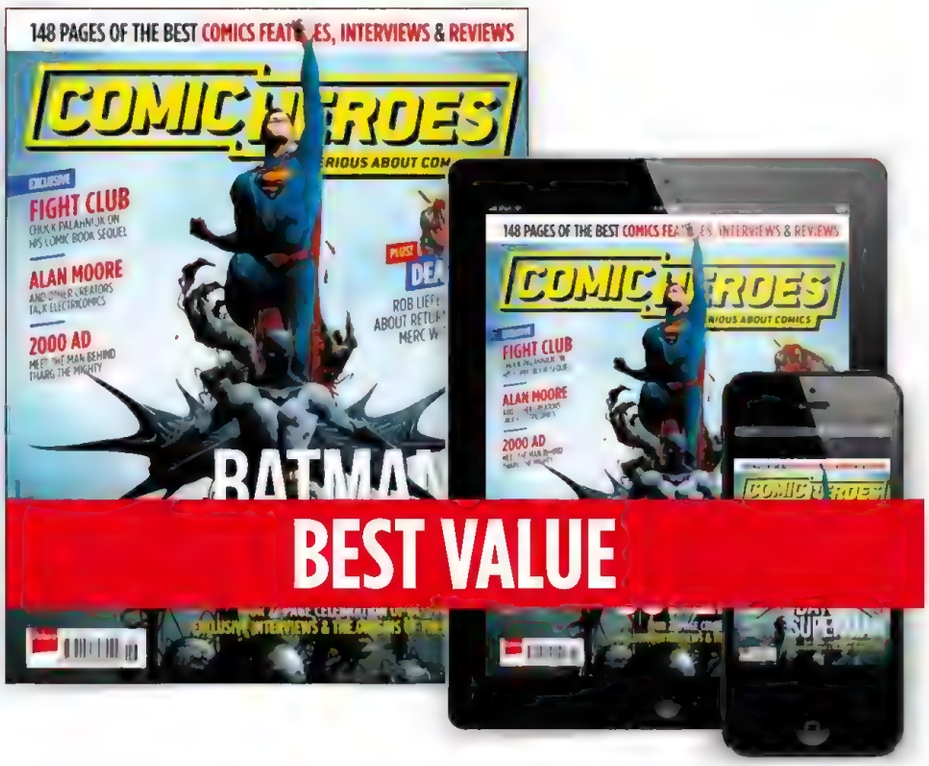

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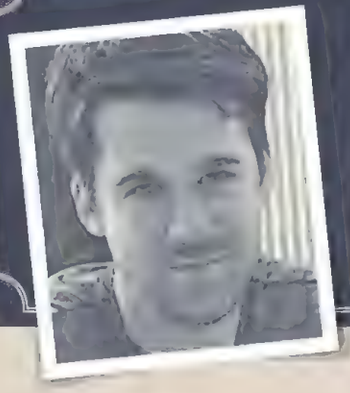
CREATING INDEPENDENT COMICS

Writer and editor **Mike Garley** continues his look at how to get ahead in creating and publishing your own comics

PART TWO: UNDERSTANDING FORMATS



Mike Garley is a writer of comics, games, screenplays and other such cool stuff. Mike wrote beActive Media's Emmy nominated comic series ***Collider***, as well as ***Wallace and Gromit***, ***Adventure Time***, ***Eponymous***, ***The Kill Screen*** and ***The Samurai Slasher***.

In this issue we're going to take a look at some of the various comic formats available to self-publishing creators, and their pros and cons.

Understanding which format would best suit your project is an important yet often overlooked step in producing comics. One of the most common mistakes creators make when starting out is to get so carried away with the idea of creating something that they aim too high and attempt to produce a comic that they just can't complete, which can damage the reputation of the creator(s).

Understanding the size and strengths of your project and how to publish it defines how successful your comic will be. I'd argue that a completed "mediocre" comic would stand you in better stead than an unfinished "great" one – as your complete comic will provide you with a finished piece of work to show people, proving you have the ability to see a project through.

I wish I'd started out telling short stories. But I didn't. I spent hundreds paying artists >

John-Paul Bove and Conor Boyle's excellent one-shot *UnEarth* is an eerie and atmospheric tale of suspense.

to illustrate stories which were so large and vast in scope that they all eventually fell apart. If I had just concentrated on telling shorter stories then at least I'd have something to show for my endeavours.

Although my first comics might not have seen the light of day, they were still a help for me as a creator. They gave me experience in working in a team, seeing how my story was conveyed on the page, and telling stories. These are skills you can only learn on the job, which is why I'd recommend that creators start small.

"One-shots have been great for me to make an impact quickly and to give shy readers and busy editors something to commit to me as a writer, rather than waiting for issue 2!"
John-Paul Bove

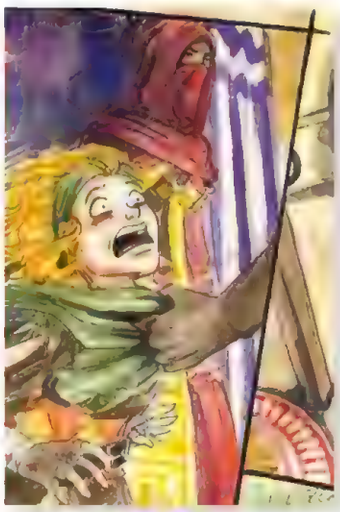
ONE-SHOT

My advice is always to start by contributing to anthologies and learn with the help of other, more experienced creators. After you've done this, only then would I suggest considering doing your own one-shot.Telling a compelling one-shot is a surprisingly difficult task, which takes a lot of skill as a creator. "Telling short stories is harder and strangely more rewarding than a 200-page opus," says *Unearth* creator John-Paul Bove. "It forces you to ensure that every word and every page is the best they can be and that discipline serves you *very* well when the time comes to write the eventual 22-page opus!"

If you need to collaborate with others then small comics have the advantage of being more attractive to potential collaborators – the shorter the project is, the easier it is for busy creators to find a slot for it in their schedules. A complete comic (especially one at a low cost point) will be an easier sell. People see spending money on indie comics as taking a chance, because they have no guarantee of the quality or if they'll ever see you again, so you want to make the experience as risk-free as possible.

Single issues are cheaper to print and to sell. If someone enjoys your comic, then they'll be more likely to pick up the next thing you produce – and if they love it, they'll be hassling you for your next project! Either way, it's about proving the quality of your work.

Jennie Gyllblad's *Skal* is a dark fantasy set in an Arabian Nights inspired desert world.



GRAPHIC NOVELS

If you aim to create an original graphic novel then again I'd suggest brevity. I see countless new creators try to do a 300-page story from the get-go, and so far I haven't even seen one finished (although at 300 pages there's a chance that they're still working on them).

If you do decide to work on a longer project then you need to make sure you have deadlines in place as well as enough flexibility within these deadlines to cope with any unforeseen problems. When working in a creative team, communication is the key – you need to ensure that you're talking regularly, and with long projects where you need to keep momentum and focus for a prolonged period of time, this is even more vital. "It's helpful to think of 'issue beats' in a long graphic novel, to avoid having sections of the story drag on way too much," says Jennie Gyllblad. "If you artificially restrict yourself a bit, you become much more ruthless. (Editing your personal project can be tough!)"

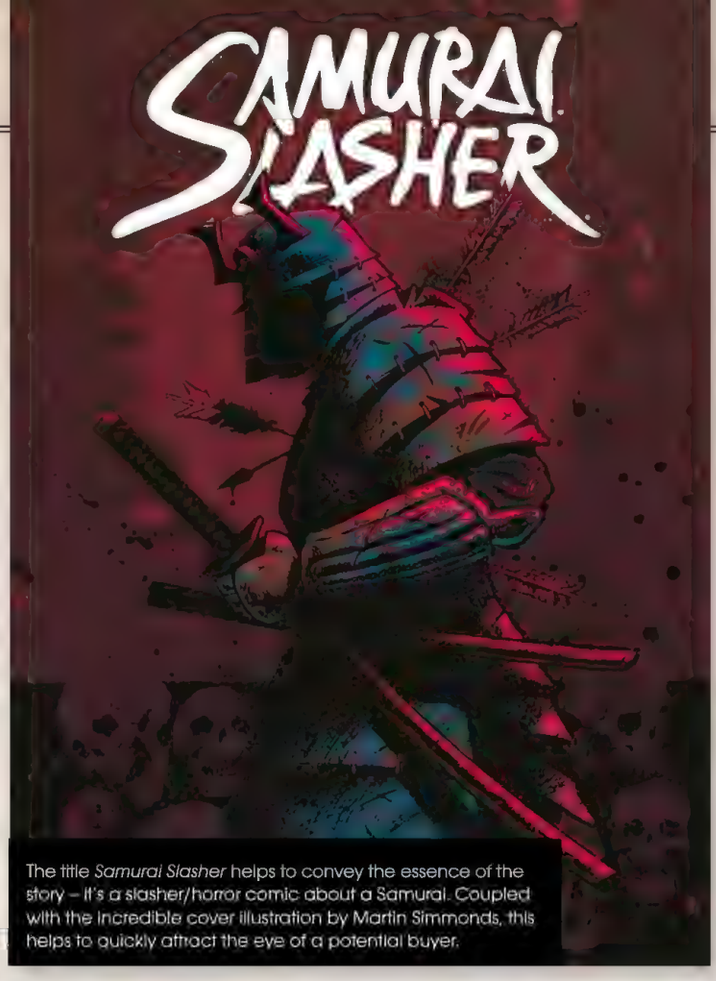
Graphic novels can be a hard sell because of the size and cost – people can be fairly reluctant to take a risk on an unknown creator, especially if you're charging over £10 (which is another reason to be realistic about page count).

The bigger the initial outlay you're asking people to make, the higher the quality of art and design needs to be, in addition to an exciting and understandable premise. This is why it's not always the best comics that succeed, and original concepts can be hard to sell. However, a strong promotional drive with positive reviews and people talking about your comic can make up for that.

With the initial cost of printing being so high, you'll need to be confident that your novel has a market, because if it doesn't sell, you could be stuck with hundreds or even thousands of pounds worth of unsold comics. >

HA! BESSY HERE IS WATCHING OVER ME. AND THERE AIN'T NOTHING IN THIS LIFE OR LAND THAT A MAN AND HIS SAT-IRON CAN'T SEE INTO THE GROUND
MY, MY. MY NO WONDER THAT REDSKIN WANTED TO KEEP THIS TO HIMSELF
...IT'S PARADISE

A page from "Firekeeper", from Sam Read's *Shorts*. Written by Sam Read, illustrated by Elias Martins and lettered by Robin Jones.



The title *Samurai Slasher* helps to convey the essence of the story – it's a slasher/horror comic about a Samurai. Coupled with the incredible cover illustration by Martin Simmonds, this helps to quickly attract the eye of a potential buyer.

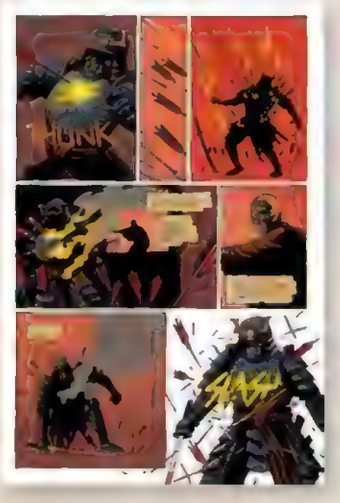
I... I THINK THE SAMURAI JUST COUGHED, BUT THAT MEANS...
THEY'VE HAD HIM ANIMATED! OH, WHAT FUN! MAYBE THIS WON'T GO BORING AFTER ALL!
EVERYONE COME AND SEE THIS!

ANTHOLOGIES

Another popular approach is to create an anthology yourself. The clear benefit is that sharing the workload means it can be completed quicker, and using different creators for different stories means it's also a lot more likely to be completed! The shorter the stories, the greater the chance of getting more established creators involved. Potential buyers see anthologies as less of a risk – there'll be more chance that they'll like at least some of the stories in there, especially as they wouldn't have picked it up if they didn't like the look of it in the first place.

There's a good amount of scope for anthologies. The most popular approach is to choose a theme (zombies, robots, horror) as it's easy for people to understand without having any knowledge of the individual stories, but you don't need to be restricted by this. If you want to tell completely disparate stories then there's nothing stopping you from doing that.

Another approach is to centre your anthology around a central character. I used this approach for my comic *The Samurai Slasher*. This allowed me to tell a bigger story (which still had a clear ending – something that I think is important) and complete the book fairly promptly.



MINI/LIMITED SERIES

Mini-series give you more room to tell a story as well as providing a lot more room for you as a creator to show what you're capable of. Crafting a great story is one thing, but crafting a story that works well enough when serialised, one that keeps people engaged enough to come back, is another.

Selling issue #1 might be a challenge, but as long as the quality is there, you should see an increase in sales at every con you attend – as long as you're not still trying to shift the same issue a year or two down the line.

Comics are about building momentum and using that to keep moving forward. Most four-part mini-series take between one and three years to complete, so require a certain level of staying power.

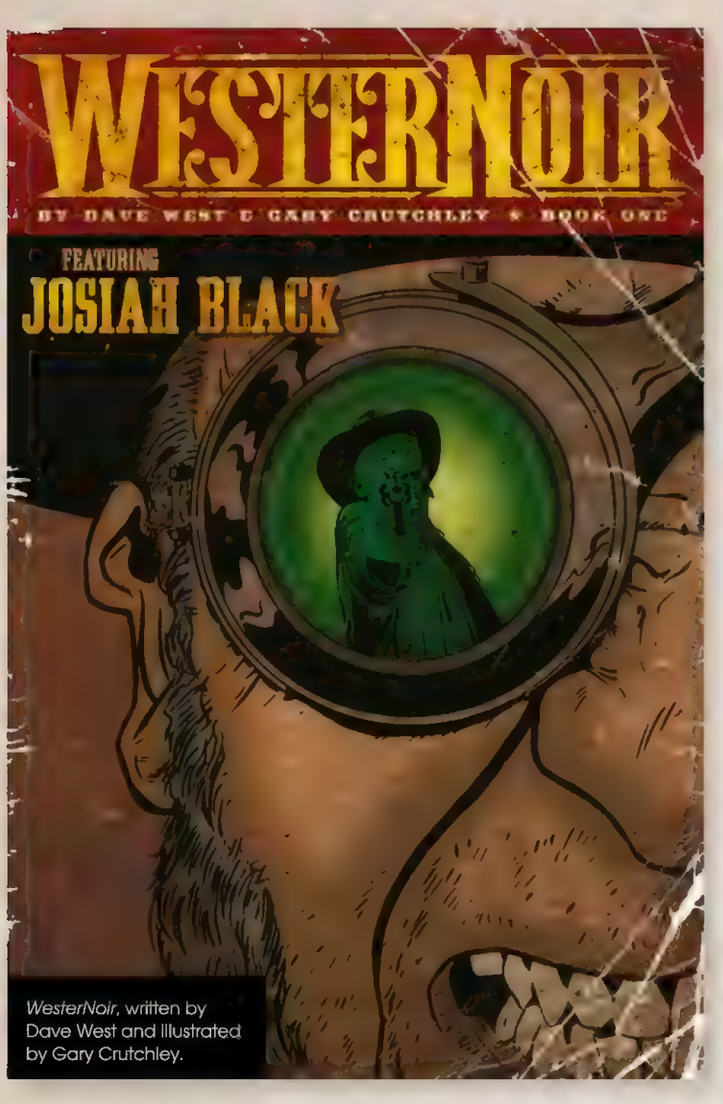
It's not unheard of for creative teams to be separated during the time it takes to complete a mini-series, and this can often kill a project. It is always important to have a contract between your co-creators, but that's even more important the longer your project is, because if you are separated then you will know where you stand in terms of ownership and have an idea whether you're going to be able to find a replacement. >

In a world where all animals are created equal, control of the genome is the key to power. *Apes 'n' Capes* is a creator-owned series written by Grainne McEntee with art by Matt Rooke.

WE ARE MILLIONS OF YEARS CONTAINED IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE
TIME MOVES AROUND US AND THROUGH US. SPACE BENDS AROUND US. CONSTANT. FLOWING LIKE AN ENDLESS TIDE
WE ARE THE UNIVERSE. BEN EACH AND EVERYONE

"Audience engagement is crucial to the success of a mini-series. Creating a wave of suspenseful peaks and interesting lulls in the story that allows the reader to crest along with you and feel part of the world you create is the key to that engagement. Don't fear the story. Let it shape you as much as you shape it."

Grainne McEntee



WesterNoir, written by Dave West and illustrated by Gary Crutchley.

ONGOING

Ongoing titles are (initially) a really hard sell – keeping your comic going over a prolonged period of time is difficult from the production standpoint, let alone the chore of promoting and attempting to sell it. Commercial comics are refreshed and revitalised by changing creative teams and new directions, and are backed up by large teams of people employed to promote them.

"I think the trick is to think big, but not so big that it is too daunting for readers," says Dave West. "We do two issues a year and one *Tales of WesterNoir* (a 'companion' comic set within the same world but using a different artist), to give Gary, the artist and co-creator, enough time to complete the artwork on the main title."

Ongoing titles are possible but you'll have to think about what you can do to make them work in terms of both production and finance. Selling comics at cons might not be the best approach; something like a Patreon or a digital/webcomic approach could.

DIGITAL

There are loads of great websites and apps designed for comics, as well as the option of having one on your own website.

I've seen several pay-to-view comic options but would suggest not using them. Generally, people don't want to pay for something that they can get for free, and with the number of other options available to them, why would they choose to pay for yours?

So while giving away your comic for free may sound like a stupid move, it can be a positive experience for the reader and the creator.

There's lots of evidence to say that if people like what you do then they'll be more likely to pick up a printed copy. This theory is based on people seeing the time they spend invested in something as an indication of that thing's worth: if they read a comic online for a year or two, they see it as having a lot of worth, as their time is valuable. This is the same logic that's used for micro-payments in computer games. Why do something laborious that takes your time when you can pay a few pence to save time?

Online comics can be great for cultivating a fanbase – once people like your comic then they're always going to be able to find it to read more, which isn't always possible if you rely on selling in stores or at cons.

Sgt Steel, written by Mike Garley, illustrated by Andy W. Clift and lettered by Mike Stock, is a web comic hosted by Tapastic.

MAKE YOUR CHOICE

Knowing how each of the different platforms/publishing methods work should help inform which direction you want to take with your project. How much time and money you can find can play a massive role in deciding what would work best for you, as well as what you want out of your comic as a creator. Some people turn to crowdfunding to help fund their comic, and we'll look into this in the next issue.

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STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

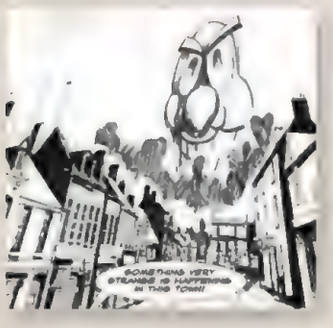
Miles Hamer picks out some of the best self-published comics right now. If you have created a comic, in print or online, we'd love to hear from you! Get in touch at stateofindependents@gmail.com

THE GRINNING MASK

Story & Art by Ryan Taylor
www.comicsy.co.uk/ryantaylor/

The Grinning Mask, a curious tale of a village filled with mystery and malevolence, is a spellbinding read. Centring on horror-comic-loving schoolboy Jack and his search for local adventure, *The Grinning Mask* starts as teenage intrigue but leads to the discovery of the sinister Archibald Sommers, the dark-hearted villain who sports the freakish headwear of the title.

Presenting a uniquely English world of pubs, local bobbies, and vicars with secrets, it taps into a rich tradition of folklore and campfire mythology, creating a wonderfully evocative chiller. Drawing on a love of "Hammer Horrors, the EC horror comics of the '50s and of course *Scream*, a short-lived UK horror comic of the early '80s," creator Ryan Taylor is soon to bring the whole story together in a collected edition.



MONSTROSITY

Story & Art by Zak Simmonds-Hurn
www.monstrositycomic.co.uk

A comic bursting with a vibrant punch of explosive violence and kinetic action, Zak Simmonds-Hurn's *Monstrosity* fizzes with a cartoonish sensibility and super-powered grotesques.

When Daigo Bezalel, a young urbanite smart-mouth living in Beheroth City, suffers from an explosion in his tower block, the last thing he expects is his right arm to be possessed by a powerful demon. Hey, we've all been there, right?

Given *Monstrosity's* angular mania, posse of bad-ass gangsters, and frenetic, off-beat beat downs, it's no surprise that Zak cites his main influences as "fast-paced action/adventure manga such as *One Piece, Dragonball* and *Berserk*."

BAO AND POM

Story & Art by Jessica Lim
www.jessicaxyl.com

Bao and Pom, the everyday mishaps of a little girl and her pet red panda, brings the kind of smile-a-frame joyousness you'll wish troubled every comic, so infectious is its good-humoured zest.

With bright and bold bubblegum pop stylings combined with a children's newspaper strip sensibility, illustrator Jessica Lim's delightful title is a visual lift to the soul. Packed amongst the slapstick and silliness are various asides and playful chuckles, all imbued with a hearty warmth.

Why a red panda? Lim says it's her favourite animal. "Everyone mistakes it for a cat or raccoon and I thought I'd address it since they're endangered and I care about their survival. Plus, they're adorable, mischievous and curious, and perfect as a sidekick."

BUMSTORM

Story & Art by Robert Luckett
www.luckettopia.com

Robert Luckett carries on the smutty lineage of *Viz* and *Oink* in a big puff of brown cloud. Guff is a pint-sized wannabe champ of "fart fighting" tournaments in which contestants chuck their guts at each other, in a comic as hilarious as it is gleefully juvenile. The book debuted at Leeds' Thought Bubble festival. "Kids and teens came for the *Regular Show* graphic novels we co-wrote but their dads stayed for *Bumstorm*. My first sale was to a father with a glint in his eye, eager to share the time-honoured British tradition of fart jokes with his brood."

FRAGILE

Story & Art by Shouri
www.fragilestory.com

Fragile is an effervescent teenage drama that charts the ups and downs of five female friends fumbling awkwardly through their last year at high school. Argentinean creator Shouri writes with a genuine affection that shines through every page, giving her characters a sparky verve. An ongoing webcomic updated twice a week, *Fragile* is a hyper-real soap opera about self-discovery, romance and growing-up. With beautifully-rendered artwork, a kick-ass all-girl rock group and plenty of costume changes, it's an irresistibly captivating read.

STAMP

Story & Art by Matthew Beakes
www.artofbeakes.blogspot.co.uk

Illustrator Matthew Beakes' first foray into self-publishing is an imaginative and whimsical one-shot that takes a simple idea and uses the medium to tell a gently elegiac short story of wish fulfilment and wonder. It's original, timeless, and surprisingly touching.

Says Matthew, "I'm new to it [comic book writing] and the next one's always going to be better than the last one, but it's a fun medium for experimentation and a fusion of technical ability and expression."

SKRAGBEARD & THE VIKINGS

Story & Art by Tim Hall
www.voidstudios.co.uk

Skragbeard, it's fair to say, is a feckless idiot. Hungover on a hostile island with only his stag-night drinking buddies in tow, the hockey-loving Nordic ninny is in a whole heap of trouble, not least from his bride-to-be, Valerie. Featuring a breathless pace and knockabout action, it's a vicious yet vivacious romp, light on plot but heavy on theatrics.

Why Vikings? Hall explains: "They sounded like a bunch of kick-ass dudes with beards and swords who enjoyed their mead. What's not to like?"

Any why self-publishing? "I hit a road-block with marketing. My thanks go to Tabella Publishing for getting some positive coverage at the release of issue 1. But after that I had to try and build awareness without a marketing budget. It's proving to be a good challenge but I'll keep at it."

MY LIFE IN COMICS

JÖRG TITTEL

AUTHOR OF *RICKY ROUSE HAS A GUN*

THE FIRST COMIC I READ

I was more of a manga fan growing up and remember spending all my lunch money on the new *Akira* chapters. How I still managed to be a fat kid, I don't know...

THE FIRST INFLUENCE ON MY WORK

This is a tough question to answer, because I'm interested in so many different things, from music, movies, theatre to fine arts, video games, the news, etc. I'm a storyteller first and foremost and like to glean inspiration from as many sources as possible. As far as *Ricky Rouse Has a Gun* is concerned, my biggest influence in spirit must have been Paul Verhoeven's films, especially *Starship Troopers*, a film that brilliantly combines action, satire and political commentary, not to mention a bit of the old ultra-violence.

MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL COMICS WORK

I'm ashamed to say that I've only written one so far. I devote most of my energy to making films and theatre with Alex, my wife and creative partner, but when our second child came along I had to find a way to create something new that I could make with just one more person. And so I wrote *Ricky Rouse Has a Gun*. It would be so awesome if we could make movies with just one artist.

MY FAVOURITE COMIC OF ALL TIME

Y the Last Man. I couldn't put it down and it's been far more satisfying than any TV series I've ever watched.

THE BEST COMIC I'VE WORKED ON

Ahem. Can you please stop rubbing in that I've only ever made one? Seriously, though, I'm very proud of *Ricky Rouse Has a Gun*. *The Boston Globe* named it one of the best books of 2014, Alejandro Jodorowsky tweeted about how much he loved it, and it got my wife into reading graphic novels.

THE CHARACTER I'D MOST LIKE TO WRITE FOR

I've already written the first few chapters of a sci-fi series with a host of awesome characters. I'll start working with artists on it imminently. But as far as existing characters are concerned, I would love to take a stab at Batman. I know everyone else probably does, too, but I feel the character has become a dull corporate product.

THE COMICS I'M CURRENTLY READING

I'm looking forward to Brian K Vaughan and Marcos Martin's latest, *Barrier*. *The Private Eye* was awesome. CH

I SUPERVISED THE CHAOTIC AFTERLIFE AND I'VE BEEN TRYING HARD VERY HARD.
TO FIND THE PERFECT NAME FOR HIM.
UNTIL I MET YOU.
RICHARD MEET RICKY.
RICKY ROUSE.
YOU MEAN... RICKY... MOUSE?
NO, IT'S ROUSE! RICKY ROUSE.
LIKE YOU.
THAT'S UH, I'M VERY FLATTERED, BUT PROBABLY NOT. ASK. I MEAN.
WHAT'S A MOUSE?
SELL
I TELL YOU WHAT IS A RIP OFF!
FOR HOLLYWOOD TO MAKE AND REMAKE THE SAME MOVIE TEN TIMES EVERY YEAR.
REMAKE HERE, REMAKE THERE, LIKE THE PUBLIC HAS AMNESIA.
CHARGING FIVE DOLLARS MORE EACH TIME JUST FOR 3D.
THAT IS A RIP OFF!
THAT IS PIRACY.
THAT IS A CRIME.
THIS IS RICKY ROUSE, BUILT ON THE PAST, DESIGNED FOR THE FUTURE.
A CHINESE ORIGINAL AND DON'T LET ANYONE TELL YOU DIFFERENT.

Above: What's it about? Imitation and innovation, China and the West, desertion and heroism... but mostly, it's about 180 pages. Joke © 1927.

Ricky Rouse Has A Gun is out now from SelfMadeHero

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Heroes from Comic Book adaptations in TV Shows

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Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel

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INSURGENCE 8

The Vampire Diaries & The Originals

10th–12th June 2016

Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel

Charles Michael Davis / **The Originals**, Matt Davis / **The Vampire Diaries**, Shaun Sipos / **The Vampire Diaries**, Chase Coleman / **The Originals** ... and more tba.

All actors appear subject to work commitment.

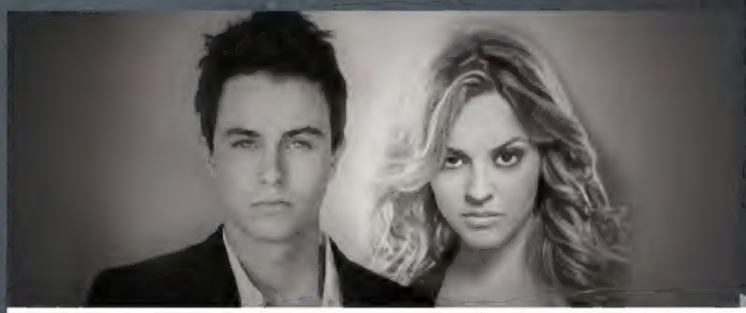
Prophecy

Buffy the Vampire Slayer & Angel the Series

17th–19th June 2016

Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel

Alexis Denisof / **BtVS, AtS**, Christian Kane / **AtS**, Tom Lenk / **BtVS**, Stephanie Romanov / **AtS** ... and more tba.



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Teen Wolf

16th–18th September 2016

Renaissance London Heathrow Hotel

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